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"YES," ROSALIND REPEATED, "I MUST FIND A RICH MAN, BUT THE QUESTION IS—WHERE?"

ROSALIND'S TEMPTATION.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"I THINK," said Rosalind, "the solution of the difficulty is that I must marry a rich man."

There was a certain finality in her voice that made the sentence impressive. A visitor to the Vicarage who had paused amongst the shrubs in time to hear the remark, smiled cynically, and then peered round the laurel bushes, and was rewarded by the sight of a very pretty picture—a beautiful young girl half reclining in a hammock; her head, with its masses of chestnut curls, pillowed on one deliciously rounded arm, her small foot in its embroidered stocking and smart little shoe, swinging lightly backwards and forwards under her blue serge skirt.

"I suppose she must be the Vicar's daughter," said the stranger to himself, and then he stole cautiously through the shrubbery to the Vicarage

—a ramshackle tumble-down old place, long and low, and covered with a close knit mantle of ivy that did its best to hold the crumbling walls together.

A pretty place, certainly, with its thatched roof, its twisted chimneys and diamond-paned casement windows, but sadly in want of the ministrations of painter and decorator.

"Yes," Rosalind repeated, after a lengthened pause, "I must find a rich man, but the question is—where is he to come from? There are no rich men about here."

"Or poor ones either for that matter," returned Nora Daintree, a small, plump, rosy-cheeked girl, who was sitting on the grass at her friend's feet. "I have often thought what a shame it is that all the boys are sent away to College, while we poor girls have to stay at home, and be satisfied with the sixteenth part of a curate—who can't, in the nature of things, be expected to divide himself into as many heads as he does his sermons!"

"And a very good thing, too," said Rosalind, drily; "but your case is not hopeless, Nora, you are going to London this season."

"Yes, I suppose so. Aunt Arbuthnot pro-

mised me a season in town, and she'll keep her word, though I don't fancy she has any hopes that I shall be a success. You see I'm plain, and plain girls hang on their chaperone's hands more than pretty ones. Now, if it were you, Rosalind, what a success you would be! How I should like to see you presented at Court, crowned with jewels, radiant in purple and fine linen—the admired of all beholders!"

Rosalind raised herself from her reclining position with sudden impatience, and clasped her hands together in her lap.

"Don't tantalize me with glimpses of a world I shall never enter!" she exclaimed, impetuously. "I am quite dissatisfied enough, as it is. I suppose it's wrong, but I do chafe most fearfully at the dull routine of my life, I long for a wider horizon, for larger opportunities, for life, not stagnation. And I am afraid I long more than anything else, for wealth, and all the pleasures it can buy. It's not a nice thing to say, is it?" she laughed, half scornfully, and the colour deepened in her cheeks. "But I never try to make myself out better than I am, and you know, Nora, what a wretched struggle I have had even to keep up a decent appearance before people."

Poverty is a terrible thing, at best, but it is infinitely more terrible when it has to disguise itself."

Nora scrambled up from her lowly position, and with a certain motherly tenderness laid her hand on the elder girl's shoulder. She did, indeed, know the struggles poor Rosalind had had ever since her mother's death, now fourteen years ago. She was an only child, and her father, the Vicar of Bassett, was a scholar whose whole life was given up to books, and who, having preached his two sermons on Sunday, left his small parish, as well as household affairs generally, to Rosalind during the rest of the week. As his income was less than a hundred and fifty pounds a year, all told, it followed that his daughter often found considerable difficulty in making both ends meet.

But she was the last girl in the world to yield to morbid despondency, and lightly shaking off Nora's hand she sprang to her feet, and led the way indoors, across the untidy and neglected lawn, and moss-grown paths, to the rose-wreathed porch, where she paused in astonishment at the sight of her father in conversation with a stranger.

"My dear," said the grey-haired old Vicar, with his half-deprecating smile, "let me present to you Mr. Verschoyle, who has just returned from abroad, and is about taking up his residence at The Court. You will join with me in welcoming him as a neighbour?"

Rosalind held out her hand with a charming grace that was all her own.

Mr. Verschoyle—who was a tall, dark man of over thirty, with a black moustache, and curiously piercing, and yet melancholy eyes—bowed low as he took it, but she fancied there was a covert smile on his lips, that seemed to her half-mocking.

"You will stay and have tea with us, Mr. Verschoyle?" she said, then she added archly, "unless, indeed, you regard tea as a ladylike weakness, beneath the notice of celebrated travellers like yourself?"

"By no means, Miss Seymour, so far as I, personally, am concerned. As for celebrated travellers, they must answer for themselves, but I should imagine that the offender a man had been round the world, the keener would be his appreciation of homely comforts."

"Amongst which you reckon the cup that cheers?"

"Certainly—especially when it is dispensed by a lady's hand."

"I'm glad you added that," chimed in Nora Daintree, "for to see a man handling cups and saucers is a truly terrible sight. A ball in a china shop is nothing to him."

Verschoyle turned upon her a pair of amused eyes, whose gaze she met with saucy insouciance.

Nora was a young person little troubled by shyness, indeed there was a sort of boyish frankness about her that was not without a charm of its own, although the young lady was sublimely unconscious of it.

The Vicarage parlour was long and low, and like the rest of the house, in a very bad state of repair.

Nevertheless it was a pretty room, and struck Verschoyle, as he entered, with a sense of refined homeliness that appealed strongly to the man who had been for ten years practically without a home.

The boards were polished to a mirror-like brightness round the square of carpet in the middle; the Chippendale tables, with their spindle legs, held big bowls of lilac and wallflowers, the curtains were spotlessly clean, and the old-fashioned chintz coverings of chairs and settee, with their carnations and roses, looked fresh and bright.

"When did you come back to The Court?" asked Rosalind, as she handed him his tea.

"Last night."

"Then you have hardly had time to look round your domain?"

"Hardly, although I was up betimes this morning, and wandering round all the old places. I was not quite sure of one of the

boundaries, and it was in order to ask your father if he could help me to define it, that I ventured to trouble him this afternoon."

The Vicar looked appealingly at his daughter.

"My dear, you will probably be able to assist Mr. Verschoyle a good deal better than I can, I have explained to him how little I know of the geography of the parish or indeed of parochial affairs generally, beyond my own immediate duties. Nearly all my time is taken up in a translation I am making of a Greek play," he added, addressing himself to his visitor, who seemed a little surprised at the communication.

Perhaps Rosalind guessed something of his thoughts, for she said, quickly,—

"My father hardly does himself justice. If there is sickness about, and he can be of any help, he is always willing to sacrifice his own comfort as well as his time, on behalf of his parishioners; but, really, we are such a healthy and well-conducted little community that the necessity doesn't often arise—does it, Nora?"

"Hardly ever," returned Nora gravely, as she turned to Mr. Verschoyle, "you have only to look at the specimens before you to be sure that the parish of Bassett Priors is everything a parish ought to be. We are not vain, but we like to be appreciated."

"Naturally," responded Verschoyle, laughing, and thereby chasing away the sombre shadow that seemed to lie on his face. "What is the good of having virtues if you are not credited with them?"

"My sentiments exactly. Sometimes, however, people are very blind, and want a little joggling to get them up to the required pitch of observation."

"And you, I presume, administer the jog under those conditions?"

"Occasionally," admitted Nora, demurely; "but I do it as gently as I can."

"Then I hope you'll let me down easily when my turn comes."

"I can't promise. It will depend entirely on how you behave in the meantime," she responded, saucily.

During this colloquy, Rosalind had been staring meditatively at the teapot; apparently lost in thought. She roused herself with a little start.

"There is an old muniment chest in the vestry," she said, speaking to Verschoyle, "and it contains various deeds relating to the parish. If you like to come in the morning, I will look through it with you, and no doubt you will find the information you want regarding the boundaries."

He thanked her, and accepted her permission, and soon afterwards went out into the garden to smoke a cigar with the Vicar, followed at some little distance by the two girls.

"Well!" exclaimed Nora, lowering her voice, "what do you think of your new neighbour?"

Rosalind hesitated before she replied.

"He is not exactly handsome, but he is striking looking," she said, at last. "He seems to me like a man with a past."

"And a bitter one, too, I should imagine," added Nora, shrewdly. "He is soured by experience, and he puts little faith in women, and I fancy he must have been crossed in love, but for all that, there are possibilities in him of regeneration. By the way, isn't there some story of his having been badly treated and kept out of his property?"

"I believe there is, though I don't know the rights of it. His father married a young wife shortly before he died, and while she lived The Court was hers, although by rights it should have gone to the son. She was a very extravagant woman, I have heard, and spent most of her time in London, while The Court was allowed to go to rack and ruin."

"Yes, and I hear the estate is heavily mortgaged, so Linda, let me give you a solemn word of warning. Don't fall in love with Mr. Verschoyle! Remember he is a poor man, and your fate is a rich husband!"

As destiny would have it, Colin Verschoyle appeared round an angle of the house, just in time to hear the warning!

CHAPTER II.

VERSCHOYLE duly presented himself at the Vicarage the next morning, and together he and Rosalind looked over the musty old deeds in the muniment chest. The young girl fancied there was a certain amount of constraint in his manner, and once or twice she caught his sad dark eyes fixed on her in a curiously penetrating way, whose meaning she could not understand. He was also inclined to be a trifle cynical, but for all that she found him extremely interesting.

Two or three days later she and her father went to call at The Court, which was in almost as dilapidated a condition as the Vicarage itself. Verschoyle himself let his visitors in, and led them to the library; there Mr. Seymour, completely in his element, at once set himself to a serious study of the books, while the host undertook to show Rosalind over the house.

She was not quite sure that she enjoyed her survey of the gaunt, dismantled rooms, which, in spite of fine proportions, and painted ceilings, looked mournfully neglected, with their faded curtains, their tarnished gilt, and their mouldy smell of disuse.

She had guessed already that Verschoyle was a proud man, and it could hardly fail to be painful to him thus to exhibit his poverty. Perhaps he divined her thoughts for he said presently,—

"Mine was not exactly a pleasant home-coming after ten years' absence. At first I felt myself like an unwelcome shade returning to earth, and I am not sure that I have quite got rid of the idea even yet. Still, in spite of everything, I am devoted to my birth-place, and though I am too poor to do anything towards restoring it, I do not think I shall ever leave it again."

They had seated themselves in one of the broad oak window seats of the picture gallery. The sunlight, slanting in through the stained glass window, made a jewelled halo round the head of Rosalind, who looked like some beautiful Princess, in her old white dress, with red roses tucked in the bodice and a large straw hat that had seen many years' service, and that she had trimmed with a wreath of real poppies and grasses.

"You will find it dull in this little out-of-the-way village," she observed.

But he shook his head.

"I think not. You must remember I have knocked about the world for the last ten years, in strange lands, and away from my own people, and I have grown tired of wandering."

He looked at her rather searchingly.

"Have you found it so very dull here?" he asked, and he seemed to await her answer with interest.

"Horribly dull," she returned, emphatically, and she clasped her slim hands together in her earnestness. "I would give anything to leave it, and see something of the world. When I think of all the throbbing pulsating life there is in great cities, while my best years drone themselves away in the small trivialities of this stupid little village, I feel like a bird beating itself to death against the bars that keep it from freedom."

She had almost forgotten to whom she was speaking. Her fathomless eyes looked past him into the distance beyond.

The intentness of his look, however, recalled her to herself, and her eyes fell, while the colour in her cheeks deepened.

"I understand," he said softly, "though I doubt whether you would be as happy in the air and tumult of the world as you are in your little quiet village home. But that is a truth one has to learn for oneself. As I said before, my own idea of happiness does not soar beyond settling down at Bassett, and having enough money to put the Court in repair."

"But then, you have had your experiences," she said, without lifting her eyes.

"Yes, and they have been for the most part painful ones."

He hesitated for a moment, then he drew a little nearer to her.

"Miss Seymour, I should like to tell you what drove me into the world, if you will not think me an egotist for boring you with my affairs."

"Well, then, when I was twenty-one, I was

engaged to a second cousin, and she and her brother came down to stay at the Court during the festivities that were arranged for my coming of age. My father was a widower, by no means old, and my fiancée was a coquette to her finger tips.

"To cut the matter short, he fell in love with her, and she, without hesitation, threw me over, and married him.

"The position was not a pleasant one," he laughed a little jarring, mirthless laugh, "but it had to be faced, and I made the best of it by going aboard with a party of explorers, who were then starting for Africa. Five years later, my father died, but there was no necessity for my return to England then, as he left everything to his wife, except the Court, which was her's for life only.

"As you know, she died about six months ago, and the consequence of that event you see in my presence here at this moment."

He spoke half banteringly, but there was a deep undercurrent of sadness in his tone that went straight to Rosalind's heart, and sent the ready tears springing to her eyes.

She understood now the meaning of those deep lines on his face, which sorrow and a woman's treachery had graven there, and with a sudden impulsive movement of sympathy she held out her hand, which he, after a momentary hesitation took, and lightly touched with his lips.

Then he rose and led the way downstairs to the library where tea was laid, and where Mr. Seymour was still poring delightedly over the books, which he seemed very much disinclined to leave.

So after tea was over, Verschoyle suggested taking Rosalind through the grounds, and it was nearly eight o'clock when they found themselves on the terrace again.

The Court was a red-brick house, with multilined windows, and gable ends which stood out clear and distinct against the sunset sky, where a few rosy clouds floated, touched with the radiance of the dying daylight.

From the thicket beyond the shrubbery came the vesper flutings of tired birds; the air was full of the odour of syringa; and to add a crowning charm to the evening, a young moon rose faintly silv'ring splendour above the treetops.

For a few minutes Rosalind and her host stood silent on the terrace; then he pointed to a curiously shaped pepper-pot sort of building at the extremity of the west wing.

"Do you believe in ghosts, Miss Seymour? That is where our family phantom is supposed to reside. Shall we go and see if we can unearth him?"

She laughingly assented, and he went indoors to fetch the keys, soon returning and leading the way to the turret.

"What sort of a ghost is it?" she asked. "An ancient or modern one?"

"Wretchedly modern, I am sorry to say, which is the reason I don't take that pride in it that a properly-authenticated spirit ought to inspire. I'll tell you the whole story, it won't be much of a tax on your patience for it is very short.

"An uncle of mine, who had served in the Indian Mutiny, and who was somewhat eccentric in his habits, settled down in the turret after his retirement from active service, and lived a very quiet life, until an event happened that was, indirectly, the cause of his death.

"It seems that in looting some royal palace in the East, he managed to get possession of part of a Rajah's regalia, consisting of splendid rubies and emeralds, both cut and uncut, and diamonds of almost fabulous value.

"My father once saw the gems, and I have heard him describe them; if they were half as magnificent as he said—and he was by no means imaginative—they must have been worth a king's ransom.

"The Colonel seems to have been somewhat of a miser, and it was said the great joy of his life was to handle the jewels, while his constant fear was that they might be stolen.

"One night they disappeared very mysteriously, stolen no doubt, by someone who knew their worth; but the strange part of the affair was that the thieves must have got into the Colonel's

bedroom and actually taken the box from under his pillow without waking him.

"No clue was ever discovered, and the old man was so distressed at his loss, that he died within six months of heart disease, accelerated by grief, and the villagers declare his spirit may still be seen wandering about the rooms, wringing its hands and moaning over the lost gems.

"I must confess I have never seen it myself, but perhaps that is because I am somewhat of a sceptic."

The turret, which was entirely disconnected with the rest of the building, contained three rooms one above another, to which access was given by a spiral staircase very insufficiently lighted.

Dust lay in thick and feathery masses on the handrails, cobwebs were festooned across the grimy windows, and the air, which was cold and vault-like, involuntarily struck a chill to Rosalind.

"This was the old gentleman's sitting-room," said Verschoyle, throwing open the door of the middle apartment. "There is some fine old tapestry here, but really, the windows are so dirty that you can't see anything. If you will wait a few seconds I'll fetch a light," and without having gone beyond the threshold he ran downstairs leaving her alone.

If Rosalind had obeyed her first impulse, she would have followed him. The dim light, and close unhealthy atmosphere affected her very disagreeably, inspiring her with a decided longing to get into the open air once more.

She looked round rather apprehensively. The room was octagonal, the walls were covered with tapestry, all more or less moth-eaten, some of it hanging in ragged festoons almost to the floor. In one of the angles half a dozen chairs were piled up, one upon another, and behind them—surely there was a dusky grey figure that looked not unlike a monk, with a shrouding cowl drawn over his head!

Rosalind was neither timid nor superstitious as a rule, and it may be that, on the present occasion, her nerves were affected by the dungeon-like air of the place, and the story Verschoyle had just repeated to her. For a few instants she stood perfectly still, staring with dilated eyes at the immovable figure from which only the length of the room divided her; then, as its arm was slowly uplifted, and it seemed to her to be advancing in her direction, she uttered a loud shriek of terror, and fled downstairs, across the terrace and into the hall, where she met Verschoyle who was just coming to join her.

Considerably alarmed at her demeanour he led her to the library, and fetched a glass of water before he asked her what had happened; but when she had recovered sufficiently to give an account of her adventure, she fancied he looked a little incredulous.

"It is impossible anyone can be in that turret," he said, dubiously. "The door was locked, as you saw, and the key has been in my possession ever since I returned."

Nevertheless, he went back and made a thorough search in every nook and corner, but without discovering a sign of an intruder.

"It was a delusion of the senses, my dear," said the Vicar, soothingly. "The records of antiquity are full of such examples, and to them we, no doubt, owe the vulgar idea of ghosts. That you really saw the spirit of Colonel Verschoyle is not for a moment to be entertained."

And this opinion Colonel Verschoyle's descendant evidently shared.

CHAPTER III.

ABOUT a fortnight later, Rosalind was returning home from the village, whither she had been on some parish business. Instead of walking along the high road, she had chosen to come through the fields, so as to enjoy the full beauty of the summer evening. It was after eight o'clock, and the stars, "the forget-me-nots of the angels," were coming out one by one in Heaven's blue garden, while the scent of the hawthorn, in the last stage of its bloom, was borne in gentle puffs on the south wind, and the

ox-eyed daisies lifted their wet white faces from the dewy grass.

"Is that you, Miss Seymour?" said a voice behind her, and Colin Verschoyle overtook her. "Your white dress had quite a spectral look in the twilight. I wondered at first, what it could be."

"You didn't suspect a ghost did you?" she returned, laughing. "You are too much of a sceptic for that, in spite of my experience in that dreadful turret chamber."

She had seen Verschoyle several times since that evening, but this was the first allusion she had made to her fright.

"Oh," he said, with sudden gravity, "I must beg your pardon for my incredulity on that occasion. I have made a discovery to-day that induces me to believe that you really did see someone. This afternoon I paid a visit to the turret myself, and in the upper room I found a couple of half burnt wax matches."

"Well!" she exclaimed, breathlessly.

"Well, those matches told me some one must have been there lately, for I had not thrown them down, and they were clearly of recent origin. Wax tapers were unknown in my Uncle Verschoyle's time. The incident has puzzled me, I can't make head nor tail of it, for Mrs. Friaby, my housekeeper, declares the turret had not been entered since I left home until I took you there, and I have no reason to doubt her word."

"Then you think it was a real living person I saw in the octagon room?"

"I feel sure of it, though I can't even guess at its identity."

They walked on for some little distance in silence, he stealing glances every now and then at the delicate beauty of her profile, while she was conscious of a strangely excited feeling which Verschoyle's presence always gave her. Presently she said, with attempted playfulness,—

"I have some news for you, Mr. Verschoyle."

"Indeed! What may be its nature?"

"I am going to London with Nora Daintree for six weeks or two months. Her aunt, Lady Arbuthnot, wrote yesterday to fix the date of her visit, and asked me to accompany her, so we both intend taking our departure the day after to-morrow."

She fancied his face grew a little paler in the dusk, but she could not be certain. At first he made no comment, and when he spoke there was a decided flavour of sarcasm in his voice.

"So your wishes are about to be realised, and you will soon find yourself launched in the vortex of London society as one of its queens! Well, I hope the position won't disappoint you."

His speech, both in words and manner, jarred upon her; it almost seemed to her that he was angry, and a mist of tears, of which she was ashamed, rose to her eyes. She turned her head away so that he should not see them. Presently they came to a stile and he held out his hand to help her. Her fingers, as they touched his, trembled, and he saw in her eyes an expression that smote him with quick remorse.

"Have I said anything to wound you, Miss Seymour? If so, believe me, I am truly penitent."

He leaned forward a little, and his face, its harsh lines softened by the starlight, looked strangely pleading and wistful.

"I fancied," she said, rather tremulously, "that you thought I ought not to go to Lady Arbuthnot's."

"And if I did think so, I had no business to say it, or even to hint it," he replied quickly.

"And yet," he added in a different tone, "why should I not be honest with you? Our friendship—if you will allow me to call it so—has not been conducted on those conventional lines that oblige me to sacrifice truth to politeness, and I will admit that I heard of your approaching departure with something more than regret. I mistrust the gay world of fashion—it has wrecked the fair promise of so many lives, it gives so little for what it takes away. Perhaps, too, a yet more selfish motive swayed me, I was thinking of how I shall miss you."

Rosalind started slightly, and her thoughts went back to her own reluctance to yield to Nora's entreaties, when, in the afternoon that young

Lady had rushed over to the Vicarage with her aunt's letter in one hand and a cheque for a hundred pounds in the other. The cheque was a present from Mr. Daintree in acknowledgment of the devotion with which Rosalind had nursed his daughter through a dangerous illness in the winter, and was intended to defray the expenses of the visit to London. Perhaps it was the excitement that had taken possession of her that made her stumble as Verschoyle helped her over the stile; if he had not caught her in his arms, she must have fallen to the ground.

For one moment she lay across his breast, and that moment brought with it a revelation to both of them. When she would have withdrawn herself from him, his arms drew her close, closer, his lips pressed themselves passionately on hers.

"Rosalind, Rosalind, I love you!" he exclaimed, quickly and hoarsely, while she could feel the great fierce throbs of his heart against hers. "I have tried my best to conquer my love—I have even told myself that you were heartless and mercenary because I once heard you declare your intention of marrying a rich man. I have done all in my power to steel myself against you, but without avail. For weal or for woe, I have yielded up my heart to you, and I cannot recall the gift. I have nothing to offer you, I am poor, I am not very young, I have none of those graces that captivate a girl's fancy, and I have had every reason to mistrust women, and yet I love you as surely never man loved before! What have you to say to me, darling?"

What she said could hardly be translated into language, but he understood it, and for a few minutes the golden gates of paradise swung back, and he and she went in!

The next evening Rosalind was wandering round the neglected old Vicarage garden, waiting for her lover to appear. The day had passed in a sort of happy dream during which she had forgotten all her old visions of wealth and splendour, had done little but recall the strange and wonderful events of the preceding evening—events that had changed the whole current of her existence; as yet she had said nothing to her father concerning them. Verschoyle was to come this evening in order to ask the Vicar's consent to their engagement, and after that had been obtained, the engagement itself was to be made public.

Ah, there he was! She hurried to meet him, while the blushes came and went in her fair face, and the lovelight deepened in her eyes.

Colin, with a movement of proud possession, drew her arm through his, and led her to the seat under the copper beech.

"Papa is in his study, had you not better go and see him?" she said, with shy timidity, and looking the while most entrancingly beautiful.

"No, dearest, I have made up my mind not to see him this evening," Colin answered, slowly. "Since I parted from you last night I have been thinking over our position, and the conclusion I have come to is that, for the present, I have no right to bind you by any promise."

"Colin!" she faltered, her lip quivering, "What do you mean?"

"Simply that I shall hold myself bound to you, but you shall not be fettered by an engagement to me. Hush, dearest, let me finish, and then you will acknowledge that I am trying my best to do right. You must go to London as you originally intended, and you must go—free!"

"You do not trust me!" she exclaimed, with hurt resentment. "Last night you spoke very differently."

"Last night I spoke with the selfishness of passion, to-night I am determined to think of nothing but your welfare. Darling, don't you understand that the scales are not evenly balanced between us—that you, with your youth and beauty, have so much to give, and I have so little to offer in return? You know nothing of the world beyond your own village, and have seen so few men, that you have no standard by which to judge me. It would be wicked of me to take advantage of your inexperience, and so I have made up my mind that you must go to Lady Arbuthnot's. There you will have a chance of seeing the world, and of enjoying its gaieties with

the zest of unfettered girlhood; and when you come back—"

He paused and looked away from her, biting his lip hard under his moustache. Heaven only knew what it cost him to give this decision.

"And when you come back," he continued, "you shall give me your answer. Mind, I hold myself bound to you. I shall think of you by day, and dream of you by night; but I will not give myself any cause for reproach at having wrested a promise from you before you knew what it meant."

And from this he would not swerve, though Rosalind assured him over and over again that she would much rather not go to London at all. Finally, however, she was forced to acquiesce in his decision.

"But," she said, slipping her hand in his, "all the same, I shall look upon myself as your future wife, though you will not let me think of myself as your betrothed. Am I not even to tell papa what has happened?"

"It is better not," he returned, sadly; then, obeying a sudden impulse, he clasped her to him almost fiercely, "ah, my darling, my darling, suppose I am doing wrong in sending you away, suppose the fate which has been cruel to me all my life, pursues me to the bitter end, and takes you from me—suppose you learn to forget me—"

She interrupted him quickly.

"Why do you hint at so dreadful a possibility, Colin! You wrong me by such suspicions."

"Forgive me, dearest," he said, humbly, "I am going to begin life over again under your sweet guidance, and you shall teach me to imitate your own beautiful faith. It is a terrible thing to have had such an experience as mine, Rosalind—it embitters everything, it poisons the springs of life at their very sources. You see, darling, if you have much to learn, I have much to unlearn."

Hand-in-hand, they sat together under the copper beech, until dusk had drawn her purple mantle over the land, and the bats and white owls had come out of the old granary, in search of prey. It was nearly eleven o'clock when they said "good-bye"—a long and lingering "good-bye," for he would not see her again before her departure for London, and Heaven only knew what might happen in the interval!

Even when he left her, he did not go straight home, but loitered about the Vicarage grounds until he traced the shadow on her blind that told him she had gone to rest. When he reached The Court, it was after midnight, and the night had changed. Long straggling masses of cloud swept over the sky, partially obscuring the stars, and a wind had sprung up, that sighed and whispered through the trees, with a dirge—like promise of rain.

As Verschoyle paused for a moment before entering he became aware of a dull, rhythmical sound like a hammer tapping at regular intervals on a wall. The noise was a peculiar one; there was no ring or vibration in it, on the contrary, it seemed muffled and deadened.

Colin waited a few minutes to see if it continued, and from what direction it proceeded, then having decided that it came from the turret, he walked rapidly thither, and tried the door, only to find it locked. The noise still went on with the same methodical regularity, thus convincing him that there must be somebody inside, though how anyone could possibly have forced an entrance was a mystery.

Clearly the only thing to do was to make an examination of the place. With this idea, he hurried indoors, and took the keys from the bureau in the library where he always kept them, at the same time taking the precaution of arming himself with a small revolver, two of whose chambers he waited to load. All this took time, and he was yet further hindered in the hall by the appearance of Josiah Friaby, the housekeeper's son, who alarmed, as he said, by hearing the door slam, had come from the servants' wing to see what was the matter.

Verschoyle, in few words, explained the situation, and Friaby followed him to the turret, which was in complete darkness, and so far as they could make out, entirely deserted. The

tapping had ceased, and though Verschoyle searched patiently for nearly an hour, he was forced at last to retire discomfited, and without having gained the least clue as to the origin of the sound.

"It ain't the first time I've heerd queer noises there," observed Friaby, with the sage deliberation of his class, as he returned to the house in the wake of his master. "They do say as the Colonel's ghost walks, looking for the fools he lost, and I wanna say as it isn't true neither."

Colin laughed at the explanation, but he was not in a position to offer a better.

CHAPTER IV.

LADY ARBUTHNOT was the happy possessor of a charming little house overlooking the park, and although she was well in the fifties, she was one of the best known, and most popular women in London. When she introduced her protégée, Rosalind Seymour, to society, everybody acknowledged that she scored a great success, and she was accordingly more sought after than ever. The world—or that portion of it which fashion recognises—simply went mad over the Vicar of Basset's beautiful daughter. Her portraits were in the shop windows, she was asked everywhere, and everywhere followed by attention and admiration—in effect, she was the belle of the season, and no fashionable gathering was considered complete without her presence.

It was only natural that Rosalind should be a little intoxicated by her success. The change from the quiet little country Vicarage, where an occasional garden party was her only recreation, to the "gilded salons" of Mayfair, and the constant glitter and excitement of a fashionable beauty's life, could not fail to have an effect on her. The dream of her life was realised, and, so far at least, the golden apples had not left a bitter taste in her mouth. She enjoyed the novel experience to the very utmost—enjoyed it to her very finger tips, as she told Lady Arbuthnot one afternoon in July, when they were waiting in the drawing-room for the arrival of the victoria that was to take them for a drive in the park.

"It is all so fresh and delightful," she said, drawing on her long tan suede gloves, as she sat on a settee close to her hostess, "and it seems to me as if I could never tire of it. My only regret is that the weeks are passing all too quickly, and they must soon come to an end."

She sighed as she spoke. Of course it would be very nice to see her lover again, and in her heart of hearts she was thoroughly loyal to him, but, as we know, Rosalind was by no means insensible to the charms of wealth and luxury, and there can be no doubt that Cinderella's kitchen looked all the more miserable and sordid after she had been to the ball than it did before!

Lady Arbuthnot glanced at the open window, through which showed a glint of blue drapery belonging to Nora, who was on the balcony watching the people passing and repassing below. Then she said, in a lowered voice,—

"There is no necessity that your holiday should come to an end, my dear. You have the chance of keeping the position you have won, and it is your own fault if you let it slip through your fingers. Of course, with your advantages you ought to make a brilliant marriage, and you have the opportunity of doing so; Sir James Lennox has shown his admiration very openly, and at any moment he may ask you to be his wife. He is young, rich, handsome, and you could not wish for a better husband."

A hot flame of blushes burnt in Rosalind's cheeks. Her eyes fell, and she looked distressed. It is true, she had not actively encouraged Sir James, but she had accepted his attentions, and been flattered by them, without for one moment, thinking of the serious intentions that underlay them. Lady Arbuthnot's words startled her, and had upon her somewhat the effect of a cold douche.

"Of course," went on her hostess, rather sharply, "if Sir James should declare himself, you are prepared to accept him?"

"No, I should refuse him."

The words were very low, but they were spoken with decision.

Lady Arbuthnot stared at her for a moment in amazement, then she said, coldly,—

"I don't think you quite know what you are saying, Rosalind."

"Yes, Lady Arbuthnot, I know what I am saying, and I mean every word."

"Why do you object to Sir James?"

"I don't object to him. I think him very kind, and charming, but I don't love him, and I'm not going to marry him."

"Love him!" echoed Lady Arbuthnot, shrilly. "I should think not. Girls are not supposed to love anyone they are not engaged to—love comes afterwards, and believe me, it is always more satisfactory than when it comes before marriage. I have had considerable experience of the world, and I know what I am talking about. I know, too, that if you are wise, you'll marry Sir James Lennox."

As a matter of fact, Lady Arbuthnot was of opinion that Rosalind owed it to her to make a brilliant match. She had been delighted at the girl's success, but she felt it would not be complete unless it were consummated by a splendid alliance at the end of the season.

Up to the present Rosalind had made no mention of her relations with Verschoyle, but now it seemed to her that it would be only fair to acquaint her hostess with them, and thus put an end to her ambitious designs on her protégée's behalf. Before, however, she could make up her mind on the subject the carriage was announced, and Nora hurried in from the balcony, looking rather disappointed—the person for whom she had been watching had not appeared.

A few minutes later, all three ladies were driving in the park, followed by the admiring eyes of the idlers behind the railings. Already Rosalind's name had become known, and more than once she heard it murmured as a block occurred, and the carriage was brought to a standstill.

The girl had an uneasy feeling that it was unworthy of her, and yet she could not prevent an overwhelming sense of elation at the homage paid to her beauty. And at the end of a week she must say good-by to it, and go back to the monotonous life at the Vicarage!

During one of the blocks, a gentleman forced his way through the well-dressed throng, and came to the side of the victoria. He was a tall, well set up, fashionable looking man of thirty or thereabouts, with handsome blue eyes, and a heavy fair moustache, and he wore a pink carnation in his button-hole.

"Ah, Sir James, how d'ye do!" said Lady Arbuthnot, effusively, "I was afraid we should not see you this afternoon. How is it you are not at the sports?"

"Because I thought there might be a chance of meeting you here," he replied, with a glance at Rosalind. "I want you to honour my coach to-morrow. There's a meet of the four-in-hand, and I thought, perhaps, Miss Seymour would occupy the box seat with me."

"I'm sure she'll be delighted," said her ladyship quickly. "She will have an opportunity of seeing the ribbons handled by the best whip in London."

He bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment, and then turned to Rosalind.

"You are fond of horses, I think you told me, Miss Seymour?"

"Very. I also told you my experience of them was limited."

"That doesn't mean you are nervous, I hope?"

"Oh, dear no," she answered, smiling. "I am not given to nerves; I have had no time for their cultivation."

"I am glad to hear it. By the way, are you going to the opera to-night?"

"Certainly we are," put in Lady Arbuthnot, "and afterwards to Lady Sonning's ball, where we shall probably meet you."

His blue eyes brightened. Once more he turned to Rosalind.

"You'll save a couple of valses for me, Miss Seymour? The first and the last."

She had only time to nod an assent when the carriage moved on; while Sir James stood

near the railings watching it till it was out of sight.

"I never saw a man more 'gone,'" observed Nora, with her usual candour. "And he is really a delightful fellow. It is very magnanimous of me to say it seeing that he never condescends to take the least notice of me when you are by, Linda."

A look of uneasiness came in Rosalind's face, and she turned away her head. She was conscious of a sudden mistrust of herself—a sudden fear lest her weakness might make her yield to temptation. She loved Verschoyle with all her heart, but she dreaded a return to the old poverty-stricken life which had been her lot for so long, and from which a marriage with Colin would offer no escape. And yet, at the same moment as this flashed across her mind, she came to the determination of telling Lady Arbuthnot of her engagement with him, and thus breaking off all intercourse with Sir James Lennox.

It is true Colin had wished their relations to each other kept secret—indeed, he had refused to acknowledge an engagement between them, but Rosalind had told herself the bond was as binding and as sacred as if it had been ratified at the altar, and she shrank with horror from the idea of any other man as a husband.

And yet if she stayed in London it would be hard to avoid meeting Sir James, since they were in the same set, and frequented the same places. Thinking it all over as they drove back to Park-lane, Rosalind came to the desperate conclusion of cutting the Gordian knot of her difficulties by giving up this last fortnight of her visit to Lady Arbuthnot and returning home, where she would be out of the reach of temptation.

As soon as they reached Park-lane, she communicated this resolve to her hostess, who was naturally both astonished and offended.

"I cannot imagine your motive for such extraordinary behaviour," she said, and then Rosalind, as briefly and clearly as she could, told her of what had passed between Verschoyle and herself—a recital that Lady Arbuthnot listened to with evident displeasure.

"You should have mentioned this before," she said. "I think it was only due to me to have told me when you first came."

"I should have done so had not Colin advised me against it," returned Rosalind, eagerly. "He would not allow me to consider myself engaged to him, so it was difficult to tell you without entering into full details."

Lady Arbuthnot put a few questions to her; then she said, triumphantly,—

"Ah! I see how it is. Mr. Verschoyle was hurried into making you an offer that he afterwards regretted, and not being able to retract, he took this method of getting out of the dilemma, thinking that if you came to London you would meet with a more suitable husband. That's it, depend upon it, my dear."

Rosalind indignantly repudiated the charge against her lover; but Lady Arbuthnot only laughed incredulously, and maintained her own opinion.

"Mr. Verschoyle is a wise man," she said. "He saw at once that you were quite unfitted to be a poor man's wife, and that a marriage between you would mean misery for both. I entirely agree with him, and so I shall refuse to regard you as an engaged girl. As for your leaving me to-morrow, it is quite out of the question. You must remember we have made engagements for every day for the next fortnight, and it is impossible to cancel them without setting all the scandalous tongues in London wagging. Besides you would be treating me very badly, and even if you decide on marrying this country lover of yours—and I'm sure I hope you won't do anything of the sort—you may just as well make the best of your opportunities and enjoy yourself while you can. There, go along *ma belle* and dress for dinner, and behave sensibly by taking the good things the gods have provided for you."

She patted her playfully on the shoulder as she left the room, and she had hardly disappeared before Nora came in from the balcony, where, immediately on her return home, she had taken up her position. Coming to her friend's side

she put her hands on Rosalind's shoulders, and looked into her eyes.

"I hope you won't think me mean, Linda," she said, wistfully, "but I have heard all you and Aunt Feodora have been saying. I didn't intend listening, but I couldn't help hearing about Mr. Verschoyle, and then I thought I had better hear the rest."

"Well!" exclaimed Rosalind, in a sort of desperation, "and what do you advise me to do? shall I go or shall I stay? I am willing to accept your decision."

"Then I say stay! I agree with Aunt Feodora that you are not suited for a poor man's wife, and I shall be dreadfully disappointed if you marry Mr. Verschoyle. But whether you do or not, you may as well finish your season in town and get all the pleasure you can in the meantime, whether you have to pay for it later on or not."

Not very wise advice, perhaps, but Rosalind had pledged herself to take it, and she would not go back from her given word.

CHAPTER V.

THE opera was very brilliant that night; a famous prima donna was singing, and all the world seemed to have come to hear her.

Fair faces gleamed from the boxes, framed in haloes of scintillating jewels; wonderful toilettes exhibited themselves momentarily as their wearers stood up to slip off their costly cloaks; the air was scented with the enervating perfume of exotics; every corner of the huge theatre was filled.

As Lady Arbuthnot and her party entered, many glasses were levelled at their box.

Rosalind looked her best that evening. She had accepted her hostess's decision, and resolutely put away from her all scruples.

For a fortnight longer she would live the life of the Fairy Princess, and then Cinderella would go back to her old quiet existence, and bid an eternal adieu to the pleasures of the great world.

Rosalind had the epicurean faculty of letting the present moment suffice, and ignoring the future.

For a little while she lost herself in the music, then came the *entr'acte*, and with it Sir James Lennox, and a dark haired, slender, handsome man rather younger than himself, at the sight of whom Nora Daintree's face flamed up into one big blush. This man had sought her company rather pertinaciously of late. His name was Denzil Murray, and he was looked upon with very scant favour by Lady Arbuthnot.

Of course the Baronet seated himself by Rosalind, and in such a position as to be well in view of the other occupants of the house. There was really nothing in what he said, or what she replied that all the world might not have heard; but he contrived to infuse a good deal into his way of saying it, and his manner was conspicuously devoted—so much so, that a man in one of the back rows of the gallery, whose glass never wavered from its position, set his teeth firmly together, while his brows contracted ominously above his sombre eyes.

"The test was too hard a one!" he muttered to himself, "I ought not to have subjected her to it."

Later on he noticed the care with which Sir James wrapped her cloak round the young girl's shoulders, and when he hurried out with the crowd, he was just in time to see her being put in the carriage by the Baronet, who, in response to an offer of a "lift" from Lady Arbuthnot, followed her in, and was driven off to Grosvenor-square.

Lady Sonning's ball was one of the great events of the season, and to be present at it argued a certain amount of prestige. As Rosalind saw the ropes of roses festooning the walls of the ballroom, the masses of costly orchids banked up in the recesses, it struck her with a curious sense of contrast that the cost of the flowers for that one night was far greater than her father's income for five years. She

danced the first valse with Sir James, as she had promised, but the room was too crowded for enjoyment, and presently he led her to a conservatory where seats were placed under the shadow of huge palms and tree ferns, and the scented waters of a fountain trickled into the big marble basin, where water-lilies lay on their cool green leaves.

On a lounge quite near were Nora and Mr. Murray. He had taken away her fan of white ostrich feathers, and was fanning her with it, while he talked, she meanwhile sitting with downcast eyes, and fingers that played nervously with the flowers on her lap.

"Is Mr. Murray a friend of yours?" asked Rosalind, suddenly, lowering her voice so as not to be overheard.

"Murray—that dark chap over there! No, I can hardly call him a friend, but I know him fairly well. Used to know his sister too—a pretty woman she was some five or six years ago. Are you interested in him? Miss Daintree seems to get on with him capitally."

That was what had just struck Rosalind, but it had not struck her half so much as the unusual shyness on Nora's face. She wondered what it meant, and reproached herself for not having given more attention to Nora's concerns.

"You needn't be afraid," laughed Sir James, who was watching her, and who put his own construction on her expression, "Murray is not a marrying man—can't afford it, besides which Lady Arbuthnot would give him his *congé* pretty quickly if he approached her with 'intentions.'"

"It's nothing more than a flirtation, take my word for it."

"You speak with authority; I won't venture to contradict you," she said, demurely.

"Oh, I've seen Murray up to the same game before, lots of times. He's said to be on the look out for a rich wife, but I don't vouch for the truth of the statement."

Rosalind glanced at her programme.

"I find I am engaged to him for the next dance. I shall ask him if he minds sitting out, for it's much too hot even for a slow valse."

Mr. Murray professed willingness to sit out, and proved himself an extremely agreeable companion. He talked a good deal of Basset, and Nora's home, from which Rosalind inferred that he must be considerably interested in Nora herself—as, indeed, he presently confessed himself to be.

"She is so bright and honest, and unaffected," he said, "I envy the man who is lucky enough to marry her."

He glanced at Rosalind rather sharply as he said this, but if he hoped to "draw" her with regard to Nora's matrimonial prospects he was disappointed, since she simply acquiesced in the statement. For a few seconds he regarded the toes of his patent leather slippers in silence; then he said, somewhat abruptly,—

"Miss Daintree tells me you are a near neighbour of hers. I suppose you know Basset Court?"

"Very well," she answered, with a slight start.

"Mouldy old hole, isn't it! I hear Verschoyle has come back to it, but surely he won't continue living there."

"He has every intention of doing so."

"More fool he, then! Why, the place is only fit for harbour rats, and they are there in shoals already."

She was looking at him with undisguised curiosity.

"How is it you know Basset Court so well?"

"Because I'm connected with the Verschoyles both by blood and marriage. My sister married Verschoyle's father. I daresay you have heard of her; she died not so very long ago."

So this was the brother of the woman who had flitted Colin! Rosalind's eyes sought in his face some likeness to his sister. He was handsome, certainly, but the face was not altogether a trustworthy one, because, perhaps, of the lines in it telling of dissipation.

The man had lived hard, had gone the pace, sounded the turbid depths of experience, and had not altogether escaped the defiling influences of the pitch he had touched.

And yet there was a certain corsair-like reckless-

ness, a bold courage in his eyes that was not without its own fascination, and that had been very disturbing to poor Nora Daintree's peace of mind.

"Well," he said, bearing her scrutiny with a whimsical smile, "what do you think of me? Have you ever seen me before do you think?"

Rosalind withdrew her gaze in some confusion.

"I beg your pardon, I am very rude. I know Mr. Verschoyle, and I was looking to see if—"

She stopped short, and he completed her sentence for her in his own fashion.

"To see if he and I were like! I believe I have heard there is some sort of family resemblance, but can't answer for it myself. I haven't seen him since his return from abroad, but I am told he has aged a good deal. I may as well confess, Miss Seymour, that I am not a favourite with Colin Verschoyle, consequently I can't look forward to the pleasure of meeting you at Basset Court. We quarrelled many years ago, and it's not very likely the quarrel will ever be patched up. I console myself with the reflection that the loss is his. But here comes some one in search of you. We must defer our discussion of Basset Court and its master to some other occasion," he added, as he made way for the cavalier who claimed Rosalind for the next dance.

The last valse she danced with Sir James. By this time the room was less crowded, and they were enabled to get round with comparative ease.

Sir James danced, as he did most other things, remarkably well, and the girl forgot all her perplexities as she swung lightly round in his arms, to the exquisite rhythm of the passionate valse music.

"Ah! that was delightful," she murmured, when they stopped. "Why can't people invite just half the number of guests, and thus double the pleasure?"

"Because to do so would not fulfil their object," he returned smiling. "Hasn't your experience of London life taught you that the great object of a ball is to crush as many people in as you can get, so as to obtain more notoriety for the decorations?"

"It is a lovely house," she said, looking round as they passed through the flower-decked hall. "I hear that the carved oak panelling in the library is wonderfully beautiful."

"Talking of old oak, you should see my place down in Surrey. There's a real old Jacobean dining-room, with a huge carved mantel-piece and a priest's hole in it. I wish you would let me take you there, Miss Seymour, I should love to show you over the place," he exclaimed eagerly, and before she could reply he added, "I'll talk to Lady Arbuthnot about it, and I might drive you all down to luncheon. It would be delightful—at least to me."

There was an expression in his eyes that made her say hastily,—

"I think you had better take me back to Lady Arbuthnot, it must be getting time for us to go home. See, it is broad daylight," pointing as she spoke to a window through whose closed blinds shafts of the dawn were making their way.

Reluctantly enough, he obeyed her, and presently they were driving back through the cold grey morning light to Park-lane.

But late, or rather early as it was, Rosalind went into Nora's room before retiring to her own and with a half-motherly tenderness helped the younger girl to take the crushed flowers from her hair, and the jewels from her throat and arms.

"Nora, my dear," she whispered, as she was on the point of departing, "you didn't tell me you had a sweetheart."

Nora flushed guiltily.

"How could I tell you what I didn't know for certain myself?" she returned, whimsically.

"But you do know now?"

"I know that he cares for me, and that I care for him, but he's not in a position to marry, and so we shall have to wait, 'it may be for years, or it may be for ever.'"

There was a little break in Nora's voice, but she was a brave girl and conquered her inclination to cry.

"That's all, Linda."

"You are not engaged to him, then?"

"Not a bit of it; where would be the good? Papa would rave, and Aunt Arbuthnot would have a fit if Denzil Murray were to present himself as my suitor. So we shall have to defer our hopes, even if our hearts grow sick in the process. There, go along, Linda! I have never been sentimental in my life, and I don't want to begin now."

So Rosalind went and lay down with the sun slanting in at her window, while the London sparrows were making their fussy preparations for breakfast on the roof above; and her dreams were of Jacobean mantelpieces and rose-wreathed ballrooms, and a slender dark man who said he hated Colin Verschoyle, and the rats dancing a quadrille in the turret-room at Basset Court.

CHAPTER VI.

A LARGE crowd had collected at the Powder Magazine to see the meet of the coaches, which proved to be an unusually strong one.

The trees had been freshened in the early morning by a smart shower of rain, which had also performed the very necessary office of laying the dust; but now the sun was shining in all the glory of his July night, and the ever shifting array of colours in the ladies' dresses made a charming foreground against the perspective of green grass and foliage.

Up the coaches came, one after another, the horses' glossy coats shining like satin as their drivers skillfully pioneered them along until they drew up at the halting place.

Sir James Lennox drove a splendid team of perfectly-matched bays, over which he had the most complete control, and beside him on the box sat Rosalind, gowned in her favourite pale pink, and wearing a large picture hat of black straw and pink roses.

One of the onlookers, who had taken up a position where he was half-hidden by the trunk of a tree, was looking at her with such unconscious intemperance that Denzil Murray, who was also sauntering past, immediately turned to see who he was. A moment later their eyes met.

"Ah, Verschoyle, so you have turned up once more! Are you in town for long?"

"Only for a day or two," rejoined Colin, a little stiffly, though he made no attempt to evade the other's greeting. "I am here on business."

"Which you evidently combine with pleasure. The meet always strikes me as one of the best worth seeing of all the shows in London, and this is an especially good one. That is a fine team of Lennox's—those bays over there."

"Is that Lennox—Jimmy Lennox, who used to be in the —th?"

"It is, but he's come into his father's title now and pots of money as well. Intends marrying and settling down into a respectable paterfamilias too. You see that pretty girl on the box? That's the future Lady Lennox."

Verschoyle grew a little pale under his tan, for the rest his face was absolutely devoid of expression.

"Do you mean Miss Seymour?"

"Yes. You have doubtless seen her pictures in the shop window." Colin set his teeth together in a rage. He had not only seen them, but had had an overpowering desire to smash the window and carry off everyone of the portraits, whose exhibition he looked upon as a desecration of their original. "She is, by way of being one of the professional beauties, and Lennox has succumbed—went down before her like a nine-pin. The engagement is not publicly announced yet, but it's an understood thing. By the way, when do you go back?"

"To-morrow or the next day, I'm not quite sure which. You need not mention to anyone that you have seen me," he added, as an afterthought.

"All right, I'll be mum. I suppose you won't care to come and look me up?"

"Thank you, no. My time during this very flying visit will be fully occupied," Verschoyle replied, rather grimly, and a few minutes later

he saw Murray seated on the coach beside Nora Daintree, who dimpled and smiled and looked quite pretty as she welcomed him.

Colin waited to see the coaches drive off, waited until the black hat and pink roses had faded in the distance, and then walked back to his hotel, thinking over what Murray had told him. He would not let himself believe it true. That Lennox admired Rosalind was patent to everybody, that he would like to marry her was probable enough, but that she intended accepting him Colin told himself, vehemently, was impossible.

And yet a horrible fear smote him, bringing a blood-red mist before his eyes as he recalled the scene at the opera last night, and her radiant smile as she sat beside Lennox on the box this morning. Suppose, after all, it was true, and he should lose her!

A groan broke involuntarily from his lips, startling the passers by, and bringing with it remembrance that he was walking along a public street, where it was more necessary to exercise self-control than in the country roads from whence he came—driven thence by a wild desire to look upon the face of the woman he loved, even though it should be from a distance, and without her knowledge. For when he journeyed to London he had no intention of letting Rosalind know it. Now, however, he changed his mind. He would see her that very day, and from her own lips learn that Murray had spoken falsely.

Meanwhile Rosalind was being whirled along through the soft July air to Lennox Royal—for a few words written by Sir James to Lady Arbuthnot in the early morning had resulted in an arrangement that he should take them all down to his country house to luncheon. Rosalind, perched up on her eminence, had somewhat the feeling of picking flowers on the edge of a precipice, but it must be admitted the gathering of such flowers brings with it a fearful kind of joy, before which that of cutting blossoms in a conservatory, pales into vapid insipidity!

The country they drove through was charming, and every now and again a glimpse of the river was visible, dotted over with boats, filled with smartly-dressed girls, and young men in their ever-becoming flannels. The song of larks trembled in the air, and beyond the hedges where the wild roses had only just ceased to bloom, the wheat stood up, high and green, or the oats nodded their graceful heads in answer to the salutation of the evening wind.

It was nearly one o'clock before they reached Lennox Royal—a fine old Jacobean house, with extensive grounds, that were evidently well-kept up. The interior matched the outside, and Sir James had clearly good grounds for boasting of his specimens of carved oak. The house was indeed a treasury of *objets d'art* and lovely furniture, moreover in the very atmosphere there breathed that sense of wealth and luxury that was so conspicuously lacking in Verschoyle's dismantled home.

Luncheon was served in the oak-room almost immediately after their arrival, and though Lady Arbuthnot sat in the seat of honour on the host's right hand, he contrived to get Rosalind next him on the left.

"I thought you told us to expect a rough picnic as you were able to give such short notice to your people," observed Lady Arbuthnot, raising her tortoiseshell lorgnette to look at the massive silver *épergues* filled with choice flowers that ornamented the table. "We were quite prepared to rough it, and here you offer us lobster salad, and Strasbourg pies, and foed champagne, and all the dainties of the season. What magic wand have you wielded to effect such wonders?"

"The very vulgar one of gold, I'm afraid," he replied, laughing. "Directly you said you would come I sent to Fortnum and Mason, and the hamper was forwarded at once. They got here some time before we did."

"After all, gold is the only Wizard we recognize nowadays," observed Danzil Murray, who had managed to get Nora next him, "and for my part I don't see the need for a better."

After luncheon, the party separated to wander

about the grounds or look through the picture galleries. Rosalind cleverly contrived to keep near Lady Arbuthnot—as much to the annoyance of that lady as of Sir James himself.

"Well, what do you think of Lennox Royal?" she asked, as the Baronet disappeared for a few minutes to give some orders, and the two ladies stood in front of the open window in one of the galleries, looking out on the trim well-kept lawns, the belt of shrubs, and beyond to the park where the deer were herded together under great girthed elms. "Isn't it a splendid place?"

"Splendid, indeed," answered Rosalind, with a half sigh.

"And you have only to say one word to become its mistress!"

The girl turned away quickly—not so much to escape Lady Arbuthnot's persuasion, as to silence the voice of the tempter in her own soul. She despised herself for the thought, but she could not stifle it. What a happy lot would be that of Sir James Lennox's wife!

They started to drive home in the late afternoon, and did not arrive in Park Lane until after eight o'clock.

Sir James accompanied them indoors, and went upstairs to the drawing-room with Rosalind, leaving the others below unpacking the hamper of flowers they had brought back with them.

The lamps had not yet been brought up, and the drawing-room was shadowy with dusky twilight; both windows were thrown wide open to let in what little air there was.

"I hope you are not tired with the journey," said the Baronet, anxiously, as Rosalind stood for a moment in the middle of the room, flicking the dust off the bunch of roses she carried in her hand.

"Oh, no, I am not at all tired."

"And you have enjoyed the day?"

"Immensely."

He looked at her critically—how young, and strong, and superbly healthy she looked, with no shadow of fatigue in her eyes, no paling of the delicate bloom in her cheeks! Her hair had become slightly disarranged, and soft little curls strayed round her brow, that had been carefully brushed back in the morning. Something in her manner, a certain shy aloofness, puzzled him now, as indeed it had puzzled him all day; but, on consideration, he set it down to maidenly diffidence, consequent on her guessing that he loved her.

Of the real state of the case he had no suspicion, neither had he any doubt as to how she would receive his suit. He was not conceited by any means, still the way in which he had been "stalked" by Belgravian mothers, had made him set a certain value on himself, and he was quite aware that he was regarded as a great prize in the matrimonial market.

All day long he had been determining that before night he would ask Rosalind to marry him, and here, surely, was his opportunity.

He glanced round to assure himself they were alone; then he came a step nearer, and in swift, half-broken sentences, that vouched for their sincerity, he told her how dear she was to him, and begged her to become his wife.

The great temptation of Rosalind's life came to her then. For a minute she remained silent, while her thoughts went back to the splendour of the old Jacobean mansion, and its broad acres, its retinue of servants, and luxurious appointments, and the wealth and position that were now offered to her. Was Lady Arbuthnot right, and was love only the dream of poets and silly girls—was it merely the shadow of that substantial good which Sir James laid at her feet?

Lennox watched her standing there with downcast eyes and crimson cheeks, and not unnaturally interpreted her silence according to his own wishes.

"Rosalind—darling!" he exclaimed, rapturously, and he drew her swiftly towards him, and kissed her lips.

That kiss broke the spell; she shrank from his touch with absolute repulsion—with a horror of herself as great as her horror of him. No, no, a thousand times no! If he offered her the crown of the world, she would not accept him as a

husband. And, oh, how could she ever wipe out the shame and pollution of his career!

She made a violent effort to free herself; wild words of reproach rushed to her lips, but before they were uttered, there came a crash of breaking china from the balcony outside, and Verschoyle himself stepped into the room.

CHAPTER VII.

ALL his life Colin had had an intense horror of what he called "scenes," and though he had been almost betrayed into making one now, his self-control returned with the emergency, and he came forward in a perfectly unconcerned way that did not hint at the whiteness of his lips, or the horrible pain at his heart.

"I must apologise for my awkward entrance," he said, addressing himself to Rosalind, and bowing ceremoniously, "I called to see you this afternoon to bring you a message from your father, and the footman said you would not be home till eight o'clock, so I came again, and as it was hot inside I waited out on the balcony. I trust I have not startled you by my stupid *contretemps* of breaking the flower-pot! I stumbled against it in the dusk."

Stunned, bewildered, she was incapable of speech, and could only make some incoherent murmur. While Sir James, not recognising Verschoyle, and anxious to get away and change his clothes so as to be back at nine o'clock, in time for the dinner to which Lady Arbuthnot had invited him, hurried from the room, only waiting as he crossed the hall to whisper joyously to his hostess.

"It's all right! She has accepted me. I'll tell you more when I get back."

The sound of the door closing behind him seemed to restore Rosalind to some measure of recollection.

"Colin!" she exclaimed, imploringly, and holding out her hands, "Colin!"

He drew back a step, but she followed until she stood in front of him, gazing with horror into the stony whiteness of his face.

"Don't look at me like that!" she cried, with low but passionate entreaty, and she forcibly caught his one hand in both of hers, "I can't bear it, Colin, appearances are against me, I know, but I am not as bad as you think. I have not been false to you, Colin, I have not, I have not! Only listen to me and I will explain everything."

Her voice rose to wild entreaty, her miserable eyes sought his, but the pitiless calm of his face never wavered.

"I desire no explanation," he said, in cold and measured tones that seemed like a rock against which her despair beat itself in vain, "I do not claim the right to one. When you left Basset you were free, and at liberty to do as you would with your freedom. If you had loved me it would have been a different matter, but I cannot flatter myself that such was ever the case, and so I do not even reproach you."

"But I wish you to reproach me, I will bear anything, everything that you may say to me, if you will only believe that, in my heart, I am true to you," she cried, desperately. "I never cared for Sir James Lennox except as a friend, and now I hate him because he dared to caress me."

"Dared!" repeated Verschoyle with scathing satire. "His conduct did not strike me as very daring under the circumstances. When a man offers himself to a woman he usually takes her silence for consent. That is the construction I should put upon it myself. Besides, your behaviour all through has simply been a leading up to this crisis. Sir James Lennox has been your constant attendant, evidently, for some time, people have coupled your names together, and you must have been perfectly aware that he intended making you an offer of marriage. If you did not purpose accepting him you have behaved abominably to him, if you did—but we need not discuss the point further. All I have to say is that I acknowledge I made a mistake, and I am perfectly willing to suffer for it. Through you I dreamt of regaining my old faith in the sweetness and purity of woman."

hood, and you have taught me my error. You have answered a fool according to his folly. That is all."

He forcibly shook off her clinging hands and went towards the door, while she stood in the middle of the room like some carved image of Despair, her head down-bent, her hands clasped loosely before her. Every word he spoke burned into her soul like red-hot iron—their *sting lay in their truth!* Yes, she had behaved abominably to Sir James, to Colin, to her own self-respect even, but surely there was forgiveness for her! Her crime was not so heinous as to deserve an eternity of punishment.

At the door he paused. Perhaps something in the hopelessness of her pose touched him, for he looked at her for a few seconds as a condemned sinner may look at the Paradise from which he is banished. Seeing his hesitation she made one last effort.

"Colin, won't you forgive me? won't you take me back?" she whispered piteously, as she stood once more at his side. "I admit that for a minute the temptation of wealth and position was almost too strong for me, but already when you appeared it was conquered. See, I confess my weakness—or sin—if you choose to call it so, but I am not the first woman who has erred and been forgiven."

Her voice had fallen to its softest, most alluring cadence; her small white hand lay again on his arm; her face, pale and eager, was uplifted to his. He dared not look into the sweet pleading eyes lest his resolution should melt.

For a minute he wavered. He loved her so! Saint or sinner what did it matter so long as she was his!

As soon as he recognised the thought he crushed it with iron resolution. At all hazards, he would be true to himself, and this truth demanded that he should put from him the woman who had broken faith with him.

He had heard Lennox's declaration of love, he had seen her in his arms, and he had not seen her efforts to free herself from the hateful embrace.

He called to mind how she had longed for wealth, and his bitter experience hardened him; his old cynicism came back like the evil spirit that went out, and returned with seven spirits more evil than itself.

Nevertheless, as he answered her, his voice had lost its harshness, but it was instinct with a certain gentle coldness that emphasised more than ever the gulf between them.

"I forgive you, Rosalind, if you desire my forgiveness; though, as I said before, you owe me no sort of reparation. I cannot even blame you for what you have done, seeing how well fitted you are to fill the position Lennox can offer you, while I have absolutely nothing by which to balance his advantages. As to our ever being more than friends again, it is out of the question. You may be sincere at this moment in wishing it, but to-morrow, when you had had time for reflection, you would wish it no longer. The temptation to which you admit you yielded once would beset you again and again, and each time it would be stronger. In the end it would master you. Besides, what chance for happiness should we have, seeing that I have lost my faith in you?"

"None!" she said, with sad acquiescence. "You are right. We must part."

And, without another word, she glided past him through the half-open door, and went blindly to her room, feeling a strange numbness in her brain as if it had frozen.

Once alone she seated herself on a low chair near the window, and stared out across the dim Park, while the great roar of London, softened by distance, mingled with the waves of sound that seemed to be sweeping through her consciousness.

By and by, it might have been hours after she came upstairs, or only minutes, Nora tapped lightly at the door before she entered.

"All in the dark, Linda? Well, I daresay you want a little peaceful time to yourself after this eventful day." She knelt by Rosalind's side and leaned her arms on her lap. "Sir James has just come back, darling, and he has told me

his news. Let me be the first to congratulate you!"

"His news!"

"That you are going to marry him. What other news is there worthy of being mentioned in the same breath?"

Rosalind broke into a loud, harsh laugh.

"What, indeed! So I am going to marry him. Well, I suppose I may just as well do that as anything else. In point of fact, it's the only alternative left me."

Nora got up hastily and in some alarm, groping about until she found the matches with which to light the gas. She turned it full on, then peered anxiously in her companion's face.

"Gracious, Linda, how white you are! What's the matter with you?" for Nora was, as yet, in ignorance of Verschoyle's visit.

"Nothing—nothing at all. I am simply white with the depth of my joy at my betrothal. I shall be red presently—as red as a rose!" and she seized a towel and began to rub her cheeks vigorously; while Nora's eyes opened wider and wider in wonder.

She had never seen Rosalind like this; her first idea was that she must be sickening for some illness, and this notion was confirmed later on when they went down to dinner, for she could not swallow a morsel of food, although her spirit had risen to a perfectly boisterous pitch, and she laughed and talked until even Lady Arbuthnot felt herself compelled to remonstrate.

"You are over-excited, Rosalind," she said when the ladies retired to the drawing-room; "you have had an agitating day, and your nerves are upset. If you will take my advice you will go to your room, and let Phoebe bring you some sal volatile. I will make your excuses to Sir James, and he will quite understand."

Rosalind silently obeyed, but when the maid appeared with the sal volatile, she was startled on the threshold by the sight of a lifeless figure stretched across the floor.

For the first time in her life Rosalind had fainted.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE next morning Rosalind was so completely prostrate that Lady Arbuthnot, in alarm, called in a doctor, who diagnosed the patient's case as one of overstrung nerves and consequent collapse, and ordered her not to leave her room.

So, for the rest of the day, she remained lying down and had ample time to think over her position. She did not buoy herself up with vain hopes that Verschoyle would relent—from the very nature of the man, she felt that his decision was irrevocable, for though his character was not naturally hard his experience had tended to make it so. The measure he dealt out to himself was doubtless as cruel as that meted to her, but this fact would not soften him one iota.

A dull sort of despair settled upon her. She did not blame him, indeed, remembering her own paltering with temptation, she acknowledged the justice of her sentence, but she seemed to herself to have grown suddenly older, and to see things from a different point of view. The false excitement of last night had all evaporated, the reaction of this last month of gaiety had set in. During the quiet hours she spent alone she had leisure to reflect on the change wrought in her life by Verschoyle's love. Until she knew him all her longing had been for fame, for enjoyment, for the pleasures of society; but, curiously enough, these things no longer appealed to her—a deeper chord had been struck in her life, and her better impulses leapt up to answer it. Never again would the existence of a more butterfly of fashion satisfy her as it had done during the last few weeks.

Two or three times in the day Lady Arbuthnot and Nora came up to see how she was, and in the afternoon a basket of delicate hothouse flowers was brought to her from Sir James Lennox. The sight of them made her turn away with a shivering dread, for they suggested the explanation that she must come to with the Baronet. Well, that must wait till to-morrow; to-day she

felt too utterly prostrate for anything, save indeed, the bitterness of repentance.

In the evening the other two ladies went to a dinner and reception, from which they did not return until very late. The weather, all day, had been very hot, verging indeed on sultry, while the closeness of the atmosphere presaged a thunder-storm. In the middle of the night it broke—such an one as Rosalind never remembered to have witnessed before. Great blinding sheets of lightning filled the sky, followed immediately by sharp percussion—like peals of thunder, whose muttering was almost continuous. As she lay in bed watching the quivering violet flames, she recalled her father's intense terror of tempest—a terror dating back to his childhood, and which he had never been able to overcome. The remembrance brought with it a sudden longing to be back with him in the quiet old Vicarage, and to take up once more the homely duties that had filled her time in the days before she had become a "professional beauty." Perhaps—it is impossible to say—the desire to be near Verschoyle may have had something to do with this resolve, for hope dies hard at nineteen, and deep down in Rosalind's heart may have lingered a faint dream that he, seeing she had given up the wealth and position which he thought had tempted her, might believe in the sincerity of her repentance, and take her back.

Early the following morning Lady Arbuthnot came into the bedroom attired in dressing-gown and slippers and with the *Morning Post* in her hand,—

"I thought you would like to see the announcement of your approaching marriage," she said, gaily, "Sir James has lost no time in making it public."

She pointed the paragraph out to Rosalind over whose face a shamed red colour had rushed.

For a few minutes she was speechless with angry indignation at Sir James's action, but justice reminded her that she alone was to blame as, on the night of Verschoyle's visit, she had made no effort to disabuse the Baronet's mind of the idea that she had accepted him.

There are some recollections that even the lapse of time cannot make less galling, and the half-hour that followed was, for Rosalind, one of them. Lady Arbuthnot's anger, when she was told that her *protégée* had firmly made up her mind not to marry Lennox was expressed in scathing satire which cut the girl like a knife. Finding invective useless she changed her tactics and became persuasive—even imploring. She reminded Rosalind of Sir James's wealth, his position, his popularity, his splendid home, and contrasted it with the tumbledown old Vicarage where the modest sum of a hundred and twenty pounds a year had to cover the family wants.

Rosalind winced at the reminder but remained firm.

"What you say is perfectly true," she admitted, "and a few days ago it might have had weight with me, but now I know that all the riches in the world won't make up for the loss of one's self esteem. If I married Sir James, I should do him as great a wrong as I should do myself!"

"You are a lovesick, romantic girl," exclaimed Lady Arbuthnot, wrathfully.

Rosalind shook her head.

"No, I don't think I am romantic, but I am quite ready to admit that it seems to me love is the thing best worth having in the world."

After such a confession Lady Arbuthnot washed her hands of her, and when Rosalind hinted at her desire to go home immediately, her hostess at once acquiesced.

Of course, her breaking off with Sir James would cause a scandal, and it would certainly be better for her to be out of the way.

With this ultimatum, Lady Arbuthnot left the room, bitterly disappointed at the result of her diplomacy.

The interview had been a very trying one to Rosalind, but as soon as she was alone she at once set about writing two letters—the first to Sir James, in which she told him the impossibility of marrying him, and the second to her father, advising him of her return home the next day.

Later on, Nora came in to help her pack. She looked pale and troubled, but carefully refrained

from making any allusion to the cause of her friend's departure, although, as a matter of fact, she was quite as vexed as Lady Arbuthnot at the turn affairs had taken.

Still, she agreed with her aunt that the only thing Rosalind could do, under the circumstances, was to leave London.

The morning post brought a letter from the Vicar containing news of an extraordinary event that had happened at Basset Court.

On the night of the storm, the lightning had struck the turret, which was the oldest portion of the building, and completely shattered the upper part of it.

Verschoyle, who had only just returned from London, hurried out to discover the extent of the damage, and was horrified at hearing groans.

Going to the spot from whence they proceeded he found a man lying amongst the debris, in an apparently dying condition, who proved to be none other than his kinsman, Denzil Murray.

Some short distance away from him, was a strong iron clamped box, and on examination this was found to contain old Colonel Verschoyle's missing jewels.

"This afternoon," the Vicar continued, "I was called to the Court to see Murray, who was supposed to be in *extremis*, and who admitted that for some time he had been engaged in trying to find the jewels.

"He was actually in the turret on the evening you were there, and but for his presence of mind in wrapping the cape of his grey ulster over his head, you must have recognised him.

"Taking advantage of your fright, he contrived to slip past you, and out into the grounds. It seems that on his sister's death, several of old Colonel Verschoyle's papers came into his possession, and amongst them a memorandum written just before he died, in which the Colonel gave a list of the jewels he had brought from India with him, and an account of their disappearance.

"His story was simply this—that one night, after looking over the gems, he decided that he must remove them to a safer place, and went to bed debating with himself as to where they should be put.

"Before getting into bed, he had placed the box under his pillow, but in the morning it had disappeared.

"The doors and windows were fastened just as he had left them; there were no signs of thieves, but though he searched every hole and corner of the turret, he could not find them, neither, indeed, did he ever succeed in tracing them.

"It seems that Denzil Murray, on reading this had been struck with the idea that the Colonel must have been a somnambulist—which was actually the case—and that going to bed with his mind full of anxiety concerning the safety of the jewels, he had got up in his sleep and hidden them somewhere in the turret.

"Thereupon Murray determined to try and find them, but his plans were upset by the arrival of Colin Verschoyle himself at the Court. Still he did not give up, and having in his possession a duplicate of the turret key, he was able to get in when he liked and carried on a systematic search of the rooms, sounding the walls for possible secret panels, but for some time without success.

"He chanced to meet Verschoyle in town the other morning, and learned from him that he might be staying a day or two in London, so he took the opportunity of going down at once to Basset in order to complete his examination of the walls, and thus it fell out that he was there on the night of the storm.

"That he was right in his surmise was proved by the strange fact of the box, with its contents intact, lying within a few feet of him, but whether he would ever have found it if the forces of nature had not betrayed the secret, cannot be said.

"Even now it is impossible to declare the exact spot where Colonel Verschoyle deposited his treasure, but that is of minor importance in view of its discovery. Denzil Murray is still in a very precarious condition, and his recovery is more than doubtful."

The letter fell from Rosalind's hand. So Colin

was now a rich man! Well, she was glad of it for his own sake, but adieu for ever to those vague hopes that had floated before her, mocking her with their sweetness.

To Colin, in his poverty, she might have made one more appeal, but between them now lay the gulf of his wealth, and it could never be spanned.

Denzil Murray, fearfully injured though he was lingered on, nursed with the utmost devotion by Colin.

It was a month after the fall of the turret, and he was lying in bed in a room facing south, the window of which was open.

Through it the golden August sunshine slanted in, and from the fields beyond the Park came now and again the sound of the sharpening scythe, as the men cut the sunburnt grain.

(Continued on page 501.)

UNDER A CLOUD.

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CHAPTER XXV.

OLIVE DURANT found life in an East London suburb a new and strange experience, at the end of a week in Mrs. Jordan's lodgings she knew that her friend, Janet Ashton, had been quite right; nowhere could she have been more completely hidden from all the people she had known since her return to England.

Bennington was a little world of its own. Geographically it might be only six miles from Regent street, but in everything but actual distance it was far remote from the gay and fashionable parts of London. Certainly, there were bright green omnibuses plying between Bennington High road and Piccadilly Circus, but no one had ever been known to travel on them from start to finish of their route. No, the busy populous suburb was far removed from such parts of London as county families pitch their tent in when they visit the metropolis, and in a little while Olive felt as safe from pursuit and detection as though she had been in a foreign country. And then a terrible shock came to her; she never read the newspapers herself, but Mrs. Ashton saw an account of the Dorton tragedy, as it was called, and thought it kinder to tell Olive herself rather than leave her to learn from chance remarks of her husband's murderous attack upon Percy Fellowes.

But Nettie was not prepared for the bitter anguish with which Olive listened to her narrative, nor for the bitter despairing cry of "Oh, if it had only been me!"

"Then you knew this Mr. Fellowes?"

"I knew him well," the pale cheek crimsoned. "Oh, Mrs. Ashton, you had better have nothing to do with me. I only bring sorrow to everyone I know."

Nettie guessed the truth, the happy young wife divined what made the Dorton tragedy so terrible to Olive, the man she loved with all her heart had been well nigh murdered by the husband she loathed and despised. It was hard to find comfort for such a grief as this, and Mrs. Ashton kept silence, not because she was unsympathising, but because Olive's trouble seemed to lie beyond human consolation.

"This settles it," said the girl, wearily; "I must never go back to High Cliff, I must never see any of them again. Do you know I had begun to hope that some day when he—Robert Lang—had left England, I might have ventured back, not to stay, you know, but just to see them."

"My dear girl, no one could attach blame to you," said Nettie, kindly.

"But it has come out that I am *his* wife; you said the papers mentioned that the prisoner was married to a young lady of old family and large fortune; they would all know it was the girl they had treated so kindly."

It was impossible to move her from her purpose. Mrs. Ashton followed the case with more interest than she had ever felt in a newspaper before, and she transmitted the bare facts to Olive, how that public sympathy was largely felt for Sir

George in his son's danger, as his only other child, a daughter, had just died in the flower of her youth.

"Poor Barbara," said Olive with the tears rolling down her cheeks; "well, at least, she is safe from Robert Lang."

Then, in time, when Lang was sentenced, the newspapers ceased to refer to the case, they announced that Mr. Fellowes was out of danger and had recovered sufficiently to be removed to the Towers. Then, there came another tragic occurrence in the north, and the Dorton assault was forgotten.

Forgotten by ordinary people, not by the girl who lived so quietly in Mrs. Jordan's lodgings, paying her rent with a punctuality which endeared her to the widow's heart, never grumbling at the smallness of the rooms or the pooriness of the attendance, but growing, each week, a little paler and more fragile, until Robert Ashton seriously alarmed, spoke plainly to his wife.

"If that girl isn't roused soon she will die. Olive Durant is just eating her heart away, Nettie; what can we do for her?"

Nettie shook her head.

"I can think of nothing, Bob," she said, sadly; "it seems to me that Olive has no interest left in life, she seems to brood over her husband's sins as though they were her own, and to long for death because she could make a sort of atonement by leaving her fortune to the people he had wronged."

"She's morbid," said Bob, practically, "and I believe, myself, she's in love, there's a look in her eyes I don't like, a look you never see about a woman's face till she has staked her all on love—and lost."

"I am sure Olive would never do anything wrong," said Nettie, rather primly. She was a good woman, and a tender-hearted one, but she belonged to that school of thought which maintains, however badly a man treats his wife, she is yet bound to care for him, because he is her husband.

Thousands of women in England hold this opinion as an article of their creed, but they are generally women who possess good husbands; if they tried a turn at the other sort for a little while their sense of duty might not be so strong.

There are some men whose treatment must kill love in a woman's heart. If a husband treats his wife as a stick or a stone without feeling; if he makes her suffer petty slights and small tyrannies every day of her life; if he openly shows her friends and his that he cares nothing in the world for her, why then for that woman to go on loving him is an impossibility. Better for her, poor soul, to be tied to a drunkard or a despot; for drunkards have their sober moments, and despots can be affectionate to those they love; but the man who, without breaking a single law of morality or offending against a single edict of respectability, yet crushes all the life and hope and faith out of his wife's heart, has more answer for than a drunkard or a despot.

A woman's love dies and is buried, good is it for her if she can bury it out of her sight promptly, but even then the aching void will blight her whole life. If she is a bad woman, she, perhaps, consoles herself with another love, and revenges her wrongs upon its object; if not, she endures her griefs bravely, but they weigh her to the ground, and before many years are over there is a deep band on her husband's hat, and women (who somehow always pity the offender in these cases) hope that poor Mr. so-and-so will have better luck in his second venture matrimonial.

So Nettie Ashton, although her soul loathed such sinners as Robert Lang, although she would not have touched him with one of her fingers, yet answered her husband's suggestion that love might be at the bottom of Olive's troubles, by a prim remark that her friend would never do anything wrong. Yet all the while she remembered Olive's grief on hearing of the attack on Mr. Fellowes, and had her own private conviction that the victim of the Dorton tragedy was dearer far to Olive than the man called her husband.

"But would it be wrong?" asked the doctor, "Because she spent twenty minutes in a church

with a man whom she found out later to be one of the worst of criminals, is she bound to close her heart against all thoughts of love for ever?"

"Of course she is."

Bob looked puzzled.

"I can't understand you good women."

"But, Bob, Robert Lang is her husband, while he lives she could not marry anyone else."

"I wasn't thinking of marrying, Nettie; don't look so shocked. If that poor child loved anyone, don't you think it would be a comfort to her to see him, to ask his advice as to her future, to tell him her troubles, even though both knew that they could never be more than dear friends?"

Nettie shook her head.

"There is nothing in all the world so dangerous as Platonic friendships, and I only hope that Mr. Fellowes will keep out of Olive's way."

"Mr. Fellowes?"

"I believe she cares for him too much," confessed Mrs. Ashton. "She almost fainted when I told her of the attack on him, and it was piteous to see her anxiety till he was out of danger."

Bob said nothing to his wife of his intention, but that morning he called in Alpha-road and asked to see Miss Durant. She often visited Nettie, but mostly in the daytime, when he was with his patients; he had not had a long talk with her for days.

He found her sitting by the fire; the early autumn had come in chill and raw. The African reared girl loved warmth, and so she had begun fires at a date which seemed to Mrs. Jordan most recklessly extravagant. She was dressed in black and looked to Bob's critical eyes lovelier than ever; at her feet, on a low hassock, sat the little founding, who had taken a marvellous fancy to the new lodger, and in spite of her foster-mother's remonstrances was always creeping upstairs to see her "pretty lady."

"I have come to scold you," said Mr. Ashton as he picked up the little girl and perched her on his knee. "Do you know you are not doing me any credit? I like my patients to get better, you grow paler every day."

"I am so tired."

"Aye. Yet you don't do much, do you?"

"No, I just sit still and think."

"That's the worst thing in the world for you. It's a thousand pities you haven't got to earn your own living. Then you would be obliged to rouse yourself."

"I shouldn't," she said, listlessly. "I haven't any energy left."

"Ah! Do you think of staying in Bennington, Miss Durant?"

"I haven't thought about it."

"Now that Robert Lang is safe in the charge of the police you know there's not the slightest reason for you to keep yourself hidden away."

"No; but I don't care where I go."

"In the nursery stories 'don't care' came to a bad end," said Mr. Ashton, lightly, then he added, in a more serious tone: "Do you think your father would like to see you eating your heart away like this?"

"If only he had lived," said Olive, wistfully, "I could have borne anything with him."

"Look here," said Mr. Ashton, kindly, "I want you to answer me a few questions. What are you fretting for?"

"My wasted life, I suppose."

"But it need not be wasted," said Mr. Ashton, "I am not good at preaching, but you must surely know that with your wealth, your responsibilities are very heavy. There is no end to the good you might accomplish."

She shook her head.

"I can't take any interest in anything."

"Not in this child?" asked Bob, pointing to the little creature who had nestled up to him and put her curly head on his shoulder. "I thought from what Mrs. Jordan said that you were very fond of Barbara."

"I am," her voice took a softer, less despairing ring; "she reminds me of a dear friend."

"Then, Miss Durant, your work is here, ready to hand. I did not live in Bennington when Barbara was born, but my partner Mr. Carr has told me over and over again that her mother

was a lady, also that she was passionately attached to the baby, and would never have deserted it willingly. His theory is that Mrs. Cliff's marriage was a stolen one and her husband turned out a ne'er do well. She went from here (Carr thinks) to her old home to confess her marriage and beseech help for her child. Carr believes that she never reached home. She was a very delicate, fragile creature, and quite unfit to undertake such a journey."

Olive looked up with a touch of interest.

"Do you mean that she died before she reached her friends?"

"No, because if she died by misadventure it would have been in the papers, and my partner took the trouble to search through all the cases of strange accidental deaths about that time. No, he says, she must have got home and died before she could tell her story, and ask help for her child."

"And what can I do?" asked Olive, impatiently. "I was not even in England at the time. Why should I succeed in finding little Barbara's relations when Mr. Carr failed?"

"Because," said Mr. Ashton, bluntly, "you can devote to the search two things my partner lacks—time and money. I believe firmly that if the proper steps were taken the little one might be restored to her mother's friends. You who have ample leisure could go into the matter thoroughly. You said just now you had no object in life. Well, here is a good work ready to your hand. You will be performing a three-fold charity, for if the quest succeeds Mrs. Jordan will be freed from a heavy burden, the child will have an easy refined home, and the hearts sore for the mother's loss may be consoled by the care of the baby."

He went away soon afterwards, but he had set Olive thinking. When Mrs. Jordan came in presently to fetch Barbara with an apology for the child's intrusion, the lodger replied,—

"I am always pleased to have her; she reminds me of a dear friend of mine. Mrs. Jordan, I wish you would tell me all you know about her mother. I can't believe any woman would desert a child like Barbara."

Barbara was asleep, and nothing loth the landlady sat down to talk.

"Deed, miss, but it's what I've said myself time after time; Mrs. Cliff meant to come back when she went away, or else to send me money for the baby. The little bits of clothes she had, showed her mother had cared for her before ever she was born; if you'll believe me, Miss, they were of the finest cambric, all trimmed with real lace. You'd not find anything to equal them in any of the shops hereabouts, and Mrs. Cliff herself was dressed as I never seed anyone before, and she'd a ring on her finger which sparkled like the big diamonds in the jewellers' windows."

"And she promised to send you money for the child?" asked Olive.

"She left a bit of a note saying she had gone to her husband, and she would come back for the baby, or send money for it."

"Have you the note still?"

"Yes, I kept it just as I keep Barbara's baby clothes; I haven't given up hope yet that someone belonging to the child may claim her."

"Did you know anything about Mr. Cliff; was he in business anywhere?"

"No. He was one of those men, miss, I fancy, who don't care much about work; good-looking and pleasant-spoken, but not thorough-bred like his wife; but how she loved him! There, Miss Durant, I've seen young wives before, but I never met one that made the fuss over her husband Mrs. Cliff did over her 'Bertie'."

Olive's brain felt ready to reel, she knew that "Bertie" had been Robert Lang's name with his intimates.

"I'll fetch the letter for you to see," resumed Mrs. Jordan; "but it won't give you an idea of the lady that she was; she looked just like a princess. Ah, miss, but a year had changed her sadly; she was terribly altered from the bonnie bride who'd been to me before."

It seemed to Olive Durant that she could never be surprised at anything again. The writing on the tumbled piece of paper was the writing of

Barbara-Fellowes; she could have sworn to it anywhere.

Mrs. Jordan was much surprised by the great attention her lodger paid to the relic.

"Will you let me try to find out the truth for you?" said Olive, gravely. "The friend, of whom the child reminds me, is dead, but I know her relations. Will you let me go my own way to work to try to discover if little Barbara has any claim on them?"

"And gladly, miss," said Mrs. Jordan. "I'm at the end of my tether myself, and can think of no other plan to try. I love the child dearly, but I've my living to earn, and as she gets bigger she'll want a better education than I can give her."

Left alone by the flickering fire, Olive fetched her writing materials, and after a few minutes thought composed the following advertisement:—

"BARBARA.—If the mother who, in January of 1867, left a little child called Barbara to the care of Mrs. Jordan, Alpha-road, Bennington, is still alive, she is earnestly requested to reclaim her little girl. If she is dead, her relations are implored to communicate with the before-mentioned Mrs. Jordan."

"Law, miss," said the landlady, "what a head you have! I did think once of advertising in the Bennington Banner, but it took me hours to write out what I wanted to say, and then I made it so long that the young man at the office wanted three-and-sixpence for it, so I just gave it up."

Olive Durant took an omnibus to the City the next day, and called at one of the large advertising offices in Fleet-street; she showed the short advertisement and arranged for its insertion in six of the chief daily papers every morning for a week. A bank-note and some gold as well changed hands, but she was well contented with her share of the transaction.

"Please Heaven my fears are wrong!" she murmured to herself as she retraced her steps eastward. "I cannot bear to think that Barbara may be *his* child."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DR. HARLEY was reading his morning paper, which did not arrive at High Cliff early enough for him to study it with his breakfast, he was dawdling over his lunch and enjoying the review of a recent work.

When he folded the paper before laying it down, his eyes were caught by the word "Barbara" in large letters in the second column of the outside sheet, and he read Olive's advertisement with breathless interest.

"Found!" he muttered to himself, "there can't be a doubt of it; the date and the name are proof positive. When that good fellow, Armitage, was racking his brains to discover the right Alpha-road, why did he never think of Bennington. Well, I'll not say a word to Sir George till I'm certain. There's very little illness about just now, I might run up to-morrow and come back the next day. I should manage the business far better than my old friend. Poor little maid, no one at the Towers wants her; they will all look on the child as a helpless encumbrance now, and in the future they'll always be looking for her to show the same faults as her father. It's almost a pity she's found, and yet I don't know, it was a terrible thought that Barbara's child might be in the workhouse."

It was five o'clock the following afternoon when Dr. Harley knocked at Mrs. Jordan's door, the good woman was out marketing and the small girl who had left in charge, ushered the stranger straight into Olive's parlour. Miss Durant had been expecting Mr. Ashton to call to see little Barbara, who seemed ailing. The small maid had been instructed to "show the gentleman in," and so, not being familiar with the doctor's features her mistake was not a strange one.

Olive started, she put up both hands to hide her face, but Dr. Harley looked at her with almost fatherly tenderness and said, quietly

"Thank Heaven I have found you! you little know how you have been missed and mourned at

High Cliff. My dear young lady, I came here to see Mrs. Jordan respecting an advertisement, but I shall have succeeded in a task I had yet more at heart. Why did you run away from us?"

"It was the only thing to do."

"At the time, yes; but, my dear, surely you read the papers. You know that Robert Lang is once more in the safe custody of the law and incapable, at present, of hurting anyone."

"I know," her voice was tremulous in its sadness, "but he had nearly killed Mr. Fellowes first. I felt Sir George and his wife would always think of me after that as the wife of their son's would-be murderer."

"My dear," said Dr. Harley, solemnly, "is it possible you have not heard the truth?"

"What truth?"

"Listen, and be prepared for strange news. You have no cause to feel shame for Lang's misdeeds. You are not, you never have been, his wife."

"But I was married to him by an English clergyman. My father consulted the highest authorities in Cape Town and they all declared the ceremony was binding."

"It might have been, but for one trifling fact; Lang at the time of your marriage possessed a living wife—you are as free as air."

"Thank God!" then coming back to earth again: "tell me Dr. Harley was it, Barbara?"

"Yes; when she was dying she told her parents of the marriage and of her child's birth; but, poor girl, her mind was very weak and she forgot to give them the address where she had left the baby. We have made enquiries in all directions, but it was only yesterday I saw the advertisement which brought me here."

"And Sir George will give little Barbara a home?"

"He will pay for her maintenance, he won't take her to live with him, you could hardly expect it."

"But the child is innocent of all wrong," said Olive, "and she is so like Barbara, the moment I saw her I noticed the resemblance, but I could not think of it. I could not bear to think that Barbara would desert a baby."

"Ah," said the doctor, gravely, "when a woman is in a scoundrel's power there's no telling what she will do. Lang had worked his fatal spells on Barbara till she had hardly any free will left, for the last three years she has been nothing more than her husband's tool."

"But," persisted Olive, "think how good she was; think of all she did for the sick and poor, and her kindness to me."

"You don't understand mesmerism, Miss Olive, and a good thing for you. I don't mean for a moment that Lang influenced every action of Barbara's daily life, there were certain things he 'willed' for her to do, such as keeping their marriage secret, providing him with money and leaving their child unclaimed; so that she obeyed him in these points, he did not trouble about the rest. I think, poor girl, that before her last illness she was fully conscious at times of the ill she wrought, and that she did her utmost in charity by way of atonement."

"Mrs. Jordan will be in soon and show you the little girl," said Olive.

"And when are you coming back to Yorkshire my dear! the Lodge is ready for you, and your cousin, even in her new found happiness, wears for a sight of you; but I forget you are not posted up in our local news. Little Alice is to be mistress of the Vicarage, vice Miss Penelope, promoted to the government of indigent widows."

"Dear Alice, I am very glad."

"So is everyone. The parish with one voice rejoices at the Vicar's change of housekeepers—the indigent widows might have a different opinion if they were asked."

Olive laughed. It was the first time Dr. Harley had ever heard her laugh. He felt it was a sign she had begun to realise the wonderful news of her freedom; that it was the forecast of a time when happiness should dawn for her, and she would be the bright, joyous creature Nature had intended her for, instead of the sad reserved girl whom everyone in High Cliff had learned to

love, even though she came among them under a cloud.

"You must come back," he urged, "you know no one except the Fellowes and myself, the Vicar, and Alice Melville have the least idea of why you left Yorkshire in such a hurry. There will be no scandal to face, no curious questions to answer."

"Did it not come out at the trial," asked Olive blushing crimson; "I never thought Robert Lang would spare me."

"My dear young lady, he spared himself; the law had a pretty heavy account for him to settle, he didn't want to answer for the crime of bigamy in addition to his other offences."

"I see!"

"For the rest," went on Dr. Harley kindly, "that precious chaperon of yours is across the water, and loses every farthing of the income allowed her by Lord Tollington if she sets foot in England. I rather fancy the Vicar will wish to rob you of Alice Melville at a very early date, but beyond this, there is no reason why all should not be with you as it was in the early summer."

"But everyone must know I ran away," objected Olive.

"The English rural mind," has very strange ideas of colonial customs, Miss Durant," said the doctor gravely; "thanks to this and a good deal of shrewdness on the part of Willet and Willet, you are supposed to have rushed off at a moment's notice to meet a friend from Cape Colony, and to have returned with her on a visit. Mrs. Wyndham did her best to shatter this little romance, but then she is so disliked in High Cliff her statements had little weight."

"Has Aunt Grace really been to High Cliff?"

"Indeed she has. She wanted to take possession of your effects, as your next-of-kin, and altogether was rather troublesome."

Then came a long silence, then Dr. Harley said abruptly,—

"You haven't asked after Percy."

"I hope Mr. Fellowes is better."

"He'll never be himself again till you go back to High Cliff," said the doctor bluntly, "up to a certain point his recovery was most satisfactory, but since he went back to the Towers he hasn't advanced a jot; it's my belief he hasn't the least desire to get well, and just gives way to despair."

"He was always so bright and cheerful," objected Olive, "and so strong and true."

"Aye, but he's had trouble enough to crush all that out of him. Poor Barbara and Lang between them pretty well ruined Sir George, and of course the penalty falls on Percy. I shouldn't be surprised in the least if the Towers had to be sold."

"Oh no, it would break Percy's heart."

"No, my dear; he doesn't seem to mind about anything; the fact is, Miss Olive, Percy Fellowes is not a man to do anything by halves, he lost his heart to you, and he can't take it back again."

"But," and a lovely colour dyed the girl's cheeks, "he knows the truth now—that I am free."

"Yes, but he has no idea where to find you, and he considers it presumption for a ruined man to aspire to an heiress. But for your fortune, I believe, he would have been in London long ago to look for you."

"But he is ill."

"His illness is on the nerves now more than the body. I believe, that with a strong incentive to recovery, with something to hope for, he would be himself in a week."

"Does he know—about Barbara's child?"

"Yes. He has little consideration for his niece, you can't expect it. By the way Barbara left you a legacy."

"Me?"

"She spoke of you a great deal at the last, she seemed certain that you would return, and she left you her little girl."

Olive's eyes filled with tears.

"She shall be a sacred trust to me. I love her dearly already."

"Barbara left you a message," went on the old doctor, "she begged that when you walked down High Cliff churchyard on your wedding

morning you would drop one flower on her grave."

Olive looked at him piteously.

"Then she knew!"

"My dear, we all know that Percy Fellowes loves you with all his heart. But he is a proud man; even when he hears where you are to be found I doubt if he will seek you out."

Mrs. Jordan came in then and exhibited her nursing to Dr. Harley. The child's resemblance to Barbara, the little note in her mother's handwriting, would have conquered the doctor's doubts but he had none. From the moment he had seen the advertisement he had been convinced that Sir George's grandchild was found.

"She's very small," said the widow, apologetically, "and she's been ailing like all through the summer; but I did my best for her."

"I am sure of that," said Dr. Harley, kindly; "in a very few days her grandfather will send you a cheque in payment for all your care, and also tell you his further wishes for the little one."

"She is very pretty," said Olive who did not think her favorite had received sufficient notice, "and so intelligent. I am sure Lady Fellowes will be fond of her in time," they were then in Olive's sitting-room and Dr. Harley spoke plainly.

"She will never have the chance, that child is dying, and it would be cruel to move her from the care of the only mother she has ever known just for a few weeks."

"But she has never beened up, only weak and ailing; delicate children live some time."

"But not children like that; your little friend has never thrived," Olive, she has been like a flower denied the sunshine and now she is just fading away; and my dear," he added, kindly, "it's better far for little Barbara to go to her mother than to live to be reproached as a convict's child."

It was quite true, Olive could not gainsay it, but oh, the pity of it!

"I am going home to-morrow," said Dr. Harley; "will you meet me at King's Cross in time for the ten o'clock express?"

"But—"

"You have suffered terribly for one so young, but happiness is near you now if only you will stretch out your hand and take it. My dear, let your love conquer pride."

CHAPTER XXVII AND LAST.

It was late afternoon, the daylight lingered still, and in the west the setting sun was turning the sky to a golden glory. Percy Fellowes sat by the window in the study looking out on to the flower beds gay with late autumn blossoms. He was considering himself rather neglected, for his father and mother had gone for a drive, taking Alice with them, and not even inviting him to join the party.

Certainly he had refused, over and over again, to drive out with them, but, for all that, he thought they should not have deserted him so completely. The afternoon had hung heavily on his hands; he was tired of reading, he did not want to doze, he had, in fact, no interest in anything, and even the sound of the returning carriage did not arouse him from his gloomy musings. The old butler soon appeared,—

"Sir George and my mistress are staying to tea with Dr. Harley, sir, and a lady wishes to see you."

Before Percy could remonstrate, a slight, black-robed figure had entered, the butler closed the door and retired.

Mr. Fellowes was on the point of telling the intruder he was too ill to see any visitors, when he suddenly turned his head and met the gaze of the beautiful dark eyes, which had haunted him through all the past weary weeks.

"Olive!"

Her hand was clasped fast in his, her beautiful face was raised to his.

"Dr. Harley said you wanted me, Percy, and I have come."

"I have wanted you always," said Percy, eagerly; "but, Olive, it must be all or nothing. I can't be content with your friendship, my darling, I want your love."



PERCY TURNED HIS HEAD AND MET THE GAZE OF OLIVE'S BEAUTIFUL DARK EYES.

Sir George and his wife had received a telegram from Dr. Harley begging them to meet the afternoon train and to bring Alice Melville with them. They were prepared for a surprise, but yet when they saw the beautiful girl they loved so well alight from the train, they could not repress a start of joyful astonishment.

It was the first break in their heavy clouds, the first ray of light in their sky since the beginning of Barbara's illness.

Olive had no cause to complain of her reception. Sir George welcomed her with genuine delight; Lady Fellowes pressed a mother's kiss upon her brow, and then the dear old couple forthwith invited themselves to tea with Dr. Harley, sending Olive and her cousin back to the Towers in the carriage.

Alice promptly retreated to her own room, feeling that no third person was wanted at the meeting of Olive and her lover.

For they were lovers fond and true, this pair who had been parted so needlessly, and who had believed themselves divided for ever by a law, human and divine.

"I shall get well now," said Percy joyously. "for I have something to live for; but, Olive, don't you know you are making a shockingly bad match?" She smiled cheerfully.

"And you are making a *mésalliance*, for an eccentric colonial girl (that's what the Wyndhams call me) is no fit bride for the heir of High Cliff Towers."

"Do you know," said Percy, gravely, "that when I heard Barbara's secret I had no room for sorrow for her sufferings, I could only feel a strange intense joy that you were free."

"You know," said Olive, almost sadly, "if that story got abroad people might yet look coldly on me; they would say that I was a wife and no wife."

"Let them say what they please," returned Percy. "You are no more Lang's wife than the lady who plays the part of a married woman on the stage is the wife of the man who acts the part of her husband for a few hours. You acted the

role, and oh, my darling, I am thankful that it was only acting."

How much they had to say and bear, how much they had to tell and listen to! When Lady Fellowes came in an hour later she found them sitting in the twilight (the sympathetic butler not liking to intrude with lamps) a look of deep content upon their faces.

"I always loved you, Olive," she said, as she kissed the girl's pure white face, "and I am thankful from my heart that you are to be my own child."

There was dinner later on; news of the engagement must have got wind, for the butler had adorned the table with the ancestral plate, only seen on grand occasions, and had produced some of his "forty-six port," and two bottles of choice champagne, and when Sir George pledged the health of the happy pair, the old servant took great credit to himself for his admirable forethought.

Willet and Willet had a pleasant task before long, for they drew the marriage settlements of their beautiful client. But first at Olive's special wish, the mortgage on the Towers was cleared off to the last penny, and High Cliff Lodge, which happened to be in the market, was purchased in her name. Of the residue of her fortune, one half was settled on herself, and left at her own disposal by will, and fifty thousand pounds were settled on Percy Fellowes for his life, and was later to form part of the revenues of the Towers. Mr. Durant's business had fetched so much more than anyone expected, that a large sum of money still remained, and Olive was able to give her favourite cousin a handsome marriage portion, and hoped to provide for the future of little Barbara.

But Dr. Harley had been right in his predictions, the little child who had been—at least indirectly—the cause of Olive's return to High Cliff, did not need anything from her relations long. She died before the day which would have made Olive her aunt, and at his *fiancé's* special request, Percy Fellowes arranged that the little one should sleep beside her mother in High Cliff churchyard.

An annuity, which made her the envy of all her acquaintance, rejoiced Mrs. Jordan's heart, and Mr. and Mrs. Ashton had no cause to regret the kindness they had shown to Olive Durant.

Percy Fellowes always felt that to Robert Ashton, under Heaven, he owed it that his darling did not sleep in a nameless grave, and when a son and heir arrived at the little house in Pennington, Mr. and Mrs. Fellowes were his sponsors, and gave their godson as a christening present, a sum which would defray the cost of the young gentleman's education, and start him in life.

But that is anticipating. It was some weeks previous that all High Cliff turned out to do honour to the double wedding, when Olive Durant and her cousin married each the husband of her choice.

The little Melvilles were there as guests, also the Durants of White Ladies, but the Wyndhams were not present. Neither was Penelope Armitage; perhaps the indigent widows could not spare her; but Dr. and Mrs. Curtis, Robert Ashton and his wife, Mrs. Jordan, and a nurse in the uniform worn by the staff of Dorton Cottage Hospital, were all honoured guests.

Both brides carried bouquets of pure white flowers, but as she passed through the church porch on her husband's arm, Mrs. Fellowes unfastened the satin ribbon round hers and scattered the blossoms in their snowy purity upon a grave so new that the green grass had not had time to cover it. . . . it was the last home of Barbara Fellowes and the little child whom she had never heard call her mother, but who now slept peacefully by her side.

The bells struck up a joyous peal as the carriages drove on towards the Towers, and the October sun shone with a brightness which recalled the summer so lately flown, as though even nature rejoiced in the happiness of the beautiful girl who had come to High Cliff a lonely unwelcome stranger—

UNDER A CLOUD.

THE END.



DON SNATCHED GUINEVERE TO HIS HEART AND KISSED HER MANY TIMES.

O MISTRESS MINE!

CHAPTER XVIII.

FATE.

GUINEVERE wandered on, at last, to that far end of the garden, remote and unfrequented, where the filbert-trees and wilderness of shrubs completely shut out all view of the house in the distance—the quiet, shadowy, dead-leaf-strewn corner where she and Loudon Mainwaring had said that terrible farewell.

And now once more was she standing here, with the shadows falling and deepening around her, and the hush of early night creeping on.

Once more was she standing amongst the tree-shadows and the trailing thicket-grasses at eventide—but this time alone!

And he? Ah, where was he?

Heaven knew—Guinevere did not!

Her head was bowed as she moved forward, and her hands were clasped before her.

Softly, almost reverently, she passed over the well-remembered ground, thinking, with a dreary sigh, how dearly she would prize now all that she had once cast from her—if it only were here again to have and to hold!

"Too late—too late!"

The accusing voice rose up within her, and would not be stilled; and the lightsome evening breeze caught up the reproachful cry and carried it on mournfully to the whispering, shivering leaves of the lilacs and the laurels, swaying there, ghostly, in the dusk at her side.

"Too late—too late!"

All at once she halted, nearly stumbling, and every vestige of colour then forsook her cheeks in an instant.

Both her hands went swiftly upward to her bosom, and she cried out sharply, as if in sudden pain.

For there, scarcely a yard or so removed from where she was standing, stretched in the long

grass, face downward, with his dark head buried in his folded arms, his hat off, and lying there beside him, his wavy hair all matted with the dew which had fallen on it, was Loudon Mainwaring—yes, lying there with his face hidden, in the garden at Ivylands, before the wide and startled eyes of Guinevere!

Hearing that almost horror-stricken exclamation which had escaped Guinevere's lips, the young man lifted his prone head quickly; lifted to her a face all white and drawn, with haggard, hopeless, despairing eyes; and then, recognising Guinevere just a few paces from him, speechless, quailing, and unutterably amazed, as though her incredulous vision were fixed upon some spectre from the unseen world, Don leapt at once to his feet.

And so there again, in the falling twilight, were the two confronting each other—there once more on the old sad battle-ground of nearly a year ago!

"No, Sir Angus, Miss Guinevere is not just now in the house, I know. She is out in the garden somewhere. I saw her crossing the lawn, and going towards the shrubberies, about ten minutes or so before you called, Sir Angus. Shall I go and find Miss Guinevere?"

Thus spoke one of Mrs. Wentworth's servants in reply to Sir Angus Adair's inquiry for his promised bride.

"Oh, thank you, no—I will not come in," said he, in his kindly, courteous way. "If Miss Wentworth is only somewhere in the garden, I can easily go and find her myself."

And he turned cheerfully from the open hall-door.

In his hand he carried a magnificent bouquet of choicest orange-flowers, shadowed with feathery dark sprays of the lovely maiden-hair.

It was for Guinevere on the morrow—her bridal bouquet, which in the morning at luncheon he had promised he would send over to her.

Only, after all, instead of sending the flowers, it had occurred to him to be his own messenger, and to bring them himself—taking advantage of the opportunity which the separation and dispersion of his guests, at the sound of the first dinner-bell, afforded for his coming.

He had no intention to remain long at Ivylands; that indeed, in the circumstances, would be out of the question.

All that he meant and hoped to do was to proffer the flowers for Guinevere's admiration and acceptance—blinking to surprise her agreeably by bringing them himself—and then to hasten back to Minister Court, to dress for dinner just as speedily as possible in the short time that would remain to him for his toilet.

So he sought her in the garden at Ivylands with the flowers in his hand—the magnificent bridal bouquet that had only just come down from town.

But he could find her nowhere.

The garden seemed deserted.

Where then could she be?

But presently the soft sighing of the growing twilight wind wafted to Sir Angus the sound of a woman's voice—a voice which seemed to his ears one of piteous distress—and then, at intervals, the accents of a deeper and more masculine voice were borne on the light wind to Sir Angus as well.

He halted in his quest, perplexed a little.

Could it be likely, at all possible, that it was Guinevere who had wandered so far as that uncultivated and neglected part of the grounds, where the thick and straggling lilac and laurel bushes grew and flourished all wild and uncared-for—yonder there beneath the branches of the elms and larches—that always unfrequented part of the extensive Ivylands garden, where the grass was a stranger to the scythe, and the black-birds and thrushes, all unmolested, built their nests in spring?

And if this were really so, who then could be the companion of Guinevere in that lonely, out-of-the-way spot?

Of course, it was scarcely probable that it was indeed she—his peerless Guinevere, as his heart always named her—nevertheless he would go and satisfy himself, and discover whether or not the evening breeze had deceived him.

So he made his way thoughtfully towards that leafy corner, whence the two voices appeared to come; and as he drew nearer and yet nearer to the thicket, the coarse greensward here deadening all sound of his footfall, he could distinguish plainly the accents of Guinevere—no shadow of doubt remained any longer; but as to the voice, that other voice in concert with her own—to whom did it belong?

It seemed altogether strange and unfamiliar to the ears of Sir Angus Adair; and he stopped involuntarily and listened now—listened with breath suspended momentarily, and a nameless, sickening dread stealing over and numbing his senses.

What in Heaven's name was she doing there—there, at that gray hour, alone with a stranger?

Why did she seem to be weeping and speaking in the same breath?

And what right had she, his betrothed, his affianced wife, to be holding a secret and troubled conference here with an unknown male companion in the gathering dusk?

A hot flush mounted swiftly to the brow of Sir Angus Adair; in the next moment he was striding forward again, with an unwonted angry glitter in his eyes.

Whoever might be her friend or foe, he was close upon them now; a few more steps in the direction of the thicket, and he would be able to hear what they were saying.

He turned the corner of a lilac-clump and found the grassy track which led direct into the place where they were.

Yet a few more paces, and then but a screen of spreading, tangled underwood divided himself from them whom he sought.

Deep into the resisting boughs he pressed himself, without the hesitation of a second, the twigs and brambles catching at and scattering the sweet fragile blossoms of the bouquet he carried—with his arms held before him as a shield, and the orange-flowers grasped unconsciously in his hand, he thrust a passage desperately through the tangle of the shadowed plantation.

He did not pause to consider whether this eavesdropping were dishonourable or no.

He neither thought nor cared just then.

The mad demon of jealousy was tearing at his very heart-strings, and blinding his reason; and destroying within him, for the time being, all sense of justice and integrity, all knowledge of right and wrong.

His one burning desire of the moment was to see then, himself unseen, the person with whom Guinevere Wentworth, his promised wife, was holding this clandestine interview.

The bouquet had become a burthen and a nuisance, an intolerable encumbrance, and he flung the sweet orange-flowers recklessly from him now, and trampled them under foot.

Then his hands were free—perfectly free—and cautiously parting the interlacing twigs and leaves, he peered forth on the other side of them.

There, amidst the long damp grass, with the trailing boughs and brambles and deepening evening shadows all round them, stood Guinevere herself and young Loudon Mainwaring!

They had heard neither the rustling of the boughs, nor the impatient, hurrying footsteps advancing in their direction.

Unhappy and distraught, they had absolutely forgotten where they were.

They were wholly unconscious that a man, with fierce despair stamped upon every death-pale lineament, and the iron entering into his very soul, was in such close proximity to themselves that he might almost have touched them both with his clenched and quivering hand—had he but just thrust it, indeed, through the branches of the plantation which merely separated him from them.

Guinevere was weeping very bitterly—as Sir Angus Adair had never yet seen her weep—with

both hands pressed to her temples, as she leaned heavily for support against a slender larch-stem.

"Oh, why could you not have kept away from this place!" she was saying between her sobs. "Why should I be cursed with the mischance to find you here to-night, of all nights, when I fully believed you to be in another country—in another country, with the sea between us!"

"This is the second time that we have met most unexpectedly, most unhappily, since—since that evening, a year ago, when you and I parted here—here, exactly where we are standing now—parted as foes, and friends no longer; and on each occasion I have thought of you as miles away from England!"

"But oh, this night—this night of all others, I say!—why should you have found me out again, when my repentance is weighing most heavily upon me, and my hardest trial of all, too, is so desperately, so terribly near?"

"Oh, Don, I have not the strength that I thought I once had!—I am weak—pitifully weak! Why should you come back to torture me like this—I cannot bear it, Don," she cried wildly, "I cannot bear it!"

"I have been no farther than London, since last I quitted Grayminster," he answered, gazing yearningly and forgivingly down on the beautiful, humble face that was neither wilful nor proud now—"in London, and nowhere else, Guinevere," he said sadly. "Indeed I told Milly, before I left home, that they were none of them to trouble themselves about writing to me until I myself had sent them a line with an address from somewhere or other, as my movements for the next month or so would probably be of an erratic and uncertain order; and, oh, Guinevere, the true secret was that I could not find in me the heart to go clean away—after hearing from the girls at home that your wedding was to take place so soon—until I had learned, until I had seen for myself, with my very own eyes as it were, that there really and truly was no hope left for me; that you, really and truly, were his very own wife, and consequently henceforward nothing to me!"

"I wanted to listen to the death-knell of all that foolish, lingering hope of mine, in the joyous pealing, you know, of your wedding-bells, Guinevere!"

"I wanted, moreover, somehow, to live that hour of wretchedness over again, here on this identical spot at Ivylands, that hour, I mean, on a certain evening in last May when in cold blood you threw me over, Guinevere, for the sake of the rich and titled lover who has won you from me!"

"There was a melancholy satisfaction in the thought of all this, particularly in that idea of listening to the joy-bells which would proclaim you to the world at large as the wife of Sir Angus Adair."

"I seemed to feel, somehow, that if I might only hear your marriage chimes, and know—having seen and heard for myself—that it was in truth all over and settled for me, beyond all power on earth to make it otherwise, there would then be some chance perhaps of my settling down in earnest to my real life work, steadily, perseveringly, doggedly, joyless and gray as that life-work must ever be to me, Guinevere, robbed of the coveted sweet blessing of your love to dignify and cheer it."

"No living being that I am aware of, yourself excepted, knows that I am in hiding in the neighbourhood; and you would never have known of it either, had you not come to this spot to-night, Guinevere."

"But—but if you have not yet been home," she said brokenly—"you are going, Don, by-and-by!"

"Perhaps—I may look them up later on," he answered gloomily. "I suppose I shall scare them a bit; but Milly herself, I fancy, will not be taken so very much aback after all. She understands better than the others the kind of fever that has got hold of me. After the first surprise she will scarcely marvel at seeing me back. And perhaps," he added now, with a bitter, mirthless laugh, "she will imagine that I have merely run down for the wedding, at your invitation, Guinevere."

"Oh, why did you come! why did you come," was all that she could say, shudderingly moaningly, with a sort of sickening terror at her soul at the remembrance of the church spectacle and the morrow.

"Do not you understand," he cried fiercely, "that I mean to see and hear everything for myself? Why, Great Heavens, Guinevere, did I not witness with my own eyesight the impious ceremony between you and that man, I do not think that I ever should be able to realise the fact that you had gone through irrevocably with the mockery of it all! No, unless my own eyes saw, and my own ears heard, I never would believe that, at Heaven's altar, you had sworn to love, honour, and obey all the days of your life a man for whom, in your heart, you care not a single straw."

And the young man laughed aloud in his misery and his pain.

But the stricken watcher, screened in the darkling shrubs, made no sign that he was there.

"Loudon—Don," she wailed, "I never dreamed—I never dreamed that it might one day come to this. I would give, now, almost the whole of my life—I would, as Heaven above us hears me—to be able to undo all that I have so wickedly done!—to be free to act as I would to-night, instead of hopelessly and cruelly fettered as you see me!"

"The evil is all of your own working, Guinevere," he returned, bitter scorn in his eyes as they rested on her, bitterer scorn even ringing out in his words. "Just a year ago, I offered you my love—confessed to you that it was all yours, and always had been. Me and my love you spurned then, and called me 'only a boy.' Yet I knew right well at the time, just as I know right well enough now, that you have loved me, and me only and alone, ever since the long ago days when we played as children together, here at Ivylands and in the old garden with Milly at home—as I indeed have loved you. Guinevere, deny it if you dare," said Loudon Mainwaring, sternly.

Once more she was weeping unrestrainedly, and wishing herself dead.

"Things cannot be altered now," she said, hopelessly. "For me, Don, all wretched as I am, there is no turning back. Too late—all too late now! I thought when I last met you that you had learned to hate me—and I wonder that you do not. Neither harm nor good, now, can it do for either of us, if I simply confess to you at the eleventh hour that you are right."

"I love you, Don. I have always loved you, and no one in the world but you."

"But I schooled and steeled my heart's best feelings against you, Loudon, and—and did that which I blindly thought must ensure my life's happiness in the end."

"Need I tell you now that I have found out my mistake; now, as I say, that it is all too late; and I am finding my punishment so great—so great—almost greater indeed than I can bear. . . . There is nothing left for me to do in this life except to take up once more the bitter burthen of my folly, and to realise just as early as I can that my tardy repentance is of no avail."

And then she sobbed and moaned again, covering her face in the dusk with her hands.

And still the stricken watcher in the thicket made no sign of his presence there.

Pity was at last stealing into those heart-broken eyes of his, and the first dreadful anger fading out of their depths.

He smiled a little mournfully, a little tiredly, as he remembered how easy it would be for him to discover to them his undreamed-of proximity, and thus bring the pair before him to direct confusion on the spot.

But to adopt such a course would be to pain and dismay his darling inexpressibly; he knew that well enough; would humiliate and shame her utterly. And he loved her by far too well, too dearly, to do wittingly either one or the other.

No. He would leave them presently, there as he had found them—unheard, as they believed, unseen, and unsuspected.

He felt acutely how unworthily and dishonourably he had acted; but, for the very life of him, he could not have stirred just yet from his secret post of observation in the garden.

Oh, what a cruel awakening was this from the fond sweet dream in which he had so lately revelled.

Heaven help him that night—he was a broken-hearted man.

"Guinevere," young Mainwaring was saying beseechingly now, "Guinevere, my darling, and never his, it is not too late believe me. Late as it is, however, there is even yet time to draw back—plenty of time, my dearest love, if you will only have the courage and the strength of will. You confess at last that you love me—that you never can love the man you stand pledged to marry to-morrow.

"You confess that the whole business has been a mistake from beginning to end. Very well, Guinevere," cried London Mainwaring, determinedly—"let the mistake end with this night—because, my darling, now that I know all, I will never let you go."

CHAPTER XIX.

A DESPERATE RESOLVE.

GUINEVERE wrung her hands impotently, murmuring and protesting inarticulately at the same time.

"Oh, how could you ever hope to be happy, Guinevere," said Don—"loving one man, and giving yourself to another! How could you dream that Heaven would ever vouchsafe a blessing upon a union so unholy in every way! My darling, you are on the brink of a precipice that is terrible—too terrible! Pause—think—there is yet time, Guinevere."

"No, no," she wept, the old despairing cry rising once more to her lips, "for me there is no turning back now!"

"There will be none in a few hours' time, you mean," returned the young man quickly, his smouldering passion again burning up, and his brow flushing hotly in his eagerness and impatience. "You need only the courage—the courage for a brave step, dear—and then indeed there is time."

She let her arms fall weakly to her side; and, with her white and woful face uplifted to his in all its fear and hopelessness, she crept, half unconsciously, close to his side.

"Don," she whispered, her voice low and hollow in its misery, "I have not that courage. I must go on as I have begun. There is no help for it. Let us part now, part, and for ever. I mean it. Good-bye."

Before she could divine the drift of his intent—before she could resist in any wise, or remonstrate with him at the wrong—he had snatched her to his heart and had kissed her many times.

She struggled wildly in his passionate clasp, but her girlish strength was as naught in comparison with his; and so, in spite of the resistance she offered, he held her there on his breast.

Then Sir Angus Adair waited to see no more, but turned from his hiding-place and staggered away; with the gray and weary face of one who, at one fell blow, has lost all the hope, the health, the brightness that go to make life dear.

"I must not marry her now—I dare not," he muttered, his head sinking dejectedly to his chest and one hand tugging automatically at his dust-coloured beard. "It would not be fair to her—it would be cruel—it would be worse than a sin to marry her now!"

"A crime even, knowing all that I unhappily do. Oh, why should she have so deceived me!—Guinevere, Guinevere! I thought her so true—so perfect—even as Caesar's wife, always; and now—and now it seems that she has never really loved me, after all!"

"After all, too, my wealth, title, and position have been the temptation—the prize to obtain which she has erred so unpardonably. It is hard indeed to reflect that she would have married me for these things alone," he mused in deepest sorrow—"hard in truth to know that her love all the while has been another's, and never at any time mine. Pretence and deception from beginning to end. Oh, Guinevere! . . .

"Well, she must be free—yes, free at any cost,

and my own life is spoiled and blighted henceforward.

"I will return home immediately, and write my farewell to her, and her own release at the same time, from Minster Court—the dear old home she would have graced so well.

"I will tell her truthfully all that I have overheard—all that mere chance has led me to witness—and then I will summon my people together, and state to them all simply that the match is broken off.

"I must not place my darling in a bad light; they must not be over harsh in their judgment of her—though Heaven knows that the wrong is her's. Still that it is really so, none shall ever learn from word or deed of mine.

"For do I not love her still, and shall I not love her for ever! Hardly a quarter of an hour since I thought myself the most blest, the happiest man in all creation; and now! . . ."

His head sank even lower on his chest, and the remainder of his speech was lost in a groan—a groan that came straight from his broken heart.

So he left the twilight garden without looking back once; and, still as a man walking with senses asleep-bound, he crossed the shadowy road and entered the park gates of Minster Court.

London Mainwaring, on releasing Guinevere from his sudden and vehement embrace, strode quickly over the low straggling hedge that topped the grassy slope on the meadow side of the garden at Ivylands, and had vanished from her sight almost before she could recover her breath—so passionately had he held her, unmindful of all resistance.

The little evening breeze still sighed and quivered amongst the boughs, and Guinevere Wentworth, feeling dazed and chilled and crushed, gathered her light Indian wrap more closely around her shoulders.

"He told me—he told me that it only needed courage," she said to herself, in a bewildered, awe-stricken, frightened sort of whisper. "Can it be possible that, even now, there is time to draw back! He said so—yes, he said so. I wonder . . . I wonder! To-morrow—to-morrow will be my wedding-day. Oh, can I draw back—now?"

She trembled from head to foot, and dropped her face in her hands again. She strove to grapple with the terrible question earnestly, steadily, and dispassionately; but her tired brain, worn out with recent excitement, seemed to spin, her mental faculties refused, as it were, to shape themselves into anything approaching lucidness of action, as had been the case with them indeed throughout the length of that maddening day.

All at once a ray of clearest light seemed to pierce and to strike athwart the confused and troubled state of her mind; and she removed her hands from her burning forehead.

She drew a deep breath of relief.

"At least, I will be honest with him at the eleventh hour," was the thought which had dawned to comfort her somewhat. "I will make full confession to him without another moment's delay. I will tell him simply and truthfully that I have never once loved him from beginning to end. Yes, I will tell Angus Adair everything this very night," she said aloud wildly. "He shall hear from my own lips how I have wronged him—nothing shall be kept back or hidden any longer. He shall know all—all!"

Her desperate resolve strengthened with each fleeting second.

"And then," said Guinevere, "if, after hearing every word that I have to say, he still would hold me to the bond of our compact, and would make me his wife, my tardy repentance and confession notwithstanding, I must bow to his decision—and endure!"

"And yet somehow I believe that he is too generous, too unselfish, too noble-hearted altogether, to take me against my will—to wed me, knowing at last that I have no love to give him.

"Surely, oh surely, he will never hold me to my word, when he hears the whole truth from my own lips at last!"

She drew out her tiny watch, and held it in the dusk close to her eyes.

It was just half-past seven—no later; and

even as the pretty toy ticked in her hand, the clock in the stable-yard clanged out the same time.

She hurried from the darkling thickets, where already the dewy shadows were growing ghostly, and the long pale grasses becoming silvery with the gathering evening mists, and gained the lighter portion of the grounds where the lawns and the flower-beds were. And soon she was entering the hall noiselessly, and speeding upstairs to her room.

The foreign maid, still packing on her knees in the dressing-room, did not hear her young mistress moving in the apartment next to it; but, on descending the stairs a few moments later, Guinevere, at the foot of them, was met by an old woman.

A tired old woman, with a very red face, and a once white cap pushed all awry.

It was the old domestic at Ivylands who was cook and housekeeper in one, and she had lived with Mrs. Wentworth for years.

"Oh, Miss Guinevere," cried this tired and harassed old person, "I have been waiting to see you! I want to know whether you think the missis and the gentleman will be home from the station punctual-like, 'cause the chickens as I have put down will be done to a turn in less than an hour."

"Mother will be home, I have no doubt, quite by half-past eight," Guinevere answered hurriedly. "And—Dorcas! If, when she returns with my uncle, she should inquire for me, and I do not happen to be in, please tell her, will you, that—that my head aches, and that I have gone for a little stroll in—in the meadow say. But no, Dorcas—stay," a little distractedly, "such a message, after all, will be unnecessary. Because by the time my mother is home I shall be back here again myself."

"Dressed, and going out with a headache, Miss Guinevere!" remonstrated the old servant, eyeing with disfavour the quiet-looking black hat and long thin dark dust-cloak in which Guinevere had attired herself for her errand. "Why not stay at home and rest quietly indoors, my dear young lady—this evening especially. It would do you more good, depend on't, than ramping about in the meadow at this time o' the evening. You have seen Sir Angus Adair, I s'pose, Miss Guinevere!" asked old Dorcas then.

"Sir Angus Adair!" exclaimed Guinevere, quickly. "No, I have not. Do you mean to say that he has been here?"

"Leastways, my dear," said the privileged old cook, "Maria came out to us all in the kitchen, and told us as how Sir Angus had been to the door, asking for you, Miss Guinevere, with the very loveliest bow-kay in his hand as she ever clapped eyes on in all her born days—you know what a chatter-mag Maria is. She told Sir Angus that you was somewhere about the garden, Miss Guinevere, and he went off directly to find you."

"Strange! I have seen nothing of him," murmured Guinevere, her brain beginning to reel again. "You are sure that he called, Dorcas?" she added anxiously.

"Certain sure," said Dorcas; "because, now I come to think of it, I saw the gentleman himself with my own eyes from the kitchen window, crossing over the road to the lodge only a few minutes ago. I expect he couldn't find you, Miss Guinevere—he did look just a bit down-hearted, I remember now."

"No wonder he was unable to find me," thought Guinevere remorsefully. "I don't suppose he even knows of the quiet corner at Ivylands where I have been to-night. He would never dream of looking for me in the twilight amidst those wild neglected shrubberies by the meadow."

Leaving the tired old cook standing there in the hall, Guinevere hastened out into the gloaming once more, fearful of arriving at Minster Court after Sir Angus Adair should have gone into dinner.

She trusted that she might be fortunate enough to find him all alone, seated reading in the library, as he not infrequently might be found before the last dinner-bell rang out from the cupola upon the roof.

The Lee-Warners and the other people, she guessed, would be either dressing or already assembled in the drawing-room, waiting for their host to join them, if he were not yet in their midst.

It was not eight o'clock. The quarter to the hour had only just chimed, and it was even possible, thought Guinevere feverishly, that she might reach Minister Court before the people staying in the house had left their rooms for the drawing-room.

Sir Angus himself was always down early, before anyone, she recollected, and was never very long over his toilet operations for the evening.

And doubtless he had been already dressed, she thought, when he called at Ivylands with the flowers which the old cook had spoken of.

Yes, she decided, there was every chance in her favour that she might find him in the library, and alone, with his books and daily newspapers strewn upon the table at his elbow, himself and a shaded reading lamp, perhaps, in the midst of the litter.

She had so often seen him thus when it had happened that she and her mother were at Minister Court together for the day, and the one eager hope to which Guinevere Wentworth now clung was that she might be fortunate enough to discover him again thus on this evening.

This evening of her terrible confession—her bridal eve! She glided along the twilight road, heedless alike of the pleasant, homely chirp of the grasshopper in the hedges, and the sweet, soul-piercing note of the nightingale somewhere from the larches in the garden of her own home, and very soon arrived at the lodge-gates of the park.

She crept through the small side one which was ajar, and unobserved by anyone at the lodge, continued her hurried way beneath the mighty spreading boughs of the old park timber.

In the distance she could see plainly the many lights of the house—lights glimmering and moving fitfully to and fro in the upper casements of the Elizabethan mansion—which to Guinevere meant the welcome assurance that the guests at Minister Court were still mainly occupied with the business of the toilet.

Within five minutes after passing through the lodge-gates, Guinevere was close upon the walls of the house itself.

It was all very still, or seemed so.

Not a sound broke the silence of the dark-timbered grounds—nothing save from the home-farm buildings sheltered in a clump of trees not far distant, a low occasional howl, prolonged and wolf-like, of a watch dog chained to its kennel.

Guinevere stole round to that side of the house where the library windows were situated.

Thank Heaven—yes!

The shutters were unclosed; for the lamp-light from within streamed out upon the terrace walk, where the big marble vases looked imposing in the dusk with their towering palms and variegated Indian grasses.

Guinevere, in the gloom outside, with a heart whose terrified beats she herself could distinctly hear in her bosom, crept softly and noiselessly on until she could touch and grasp the stone-work of that door-window in the library which opened to the terrace-walk.

She peered into the great room cautiously, her soul burning in her eyes.

Yes, there sat Sir Angus Adair, as she had prayed all along that she might discover him; but he was seated, she noticed, at his writing-table, as though he were busy with letters.

She noticed too, with a sort of vague wonderment and perplexity, that he was still dressed as she had seen him at luncheon at Ivylands in the morning; and that the attitude in which he was sitting in his elbow writing chair seemed to be one of the deepest dejection and despondency, as though his thoughts were very sad ones—the hour and his surroundings alike forgotten.

She could see but little of his face, for his left hand was covering his eyes—the lower part being hidden by his beard, which seemed almost to rest upon the desk before him.

And the elbow of the arm which supported the bowed head rested upon the desk likewise.

It was true that ink, pens, and writing-paper were all conveniently around him as he sat there; but his right arm hung passively, loosely, by his side, the fingers of that inanimate right hand nearly touching the floor.

Guinevere Wentworth thought the whole scene a remarkably curious one; and a cold, indefinable sensation of coming horror thrilled her as she hovered there by the window outside.

The watch dog at the home-farm howled again, and the ghostly twilight wind scraped the creeper leaves uncannily upon the cold window-panes.

Now that the dreadful moment was really with her, she felt and understood indeed that she lacked sorely that moral courage and stability of purpose which London Mainwaring, in his love and anger, had preached so fiercely to her only a little while before.

The minutes were fleeing.

With them her opportunity was fast slipping away too.

With chilly, palsied fingers, Guinevere tapped on the window.

(To be continued.)

CINDERELLA.

—201—

CHAPTER XXXI.—(continued.)

HERE Sir Philip came at last. How stout he was getting! He should not wear light clothes. Ah, how slim she once remembered him!

"Well, Valerie, here I am," he said, with an assumption of ease, as he took her hand and then a seat beside her. "What is it that you have to say to me? I'm up to time, am I not?"

"I say," looking him full in the face, "that you are a false man—a heartless, wicked, odious man."

"And why?" shrugging his shoulders, knowing well what she meant.

"Why? I do not care to enter into particulars, but you are as well aware of what I mean as I am," fiercely.

"If you mean that I ought to have married you, Val, you are quite wrong," he said, bravely. "You and I are old friends, and know one another far too well."

"It will be a failure like the last," she exclaimed, emphatically. "That poor fool worshipped you, believed in you, ha, ha, ha!" and Madame laughed a strange, very unpleasant laugh. "This one is another thing. She cares for herself—and for money—that's all. She will make you an old fogey in a year, and laugh at you with all her own friends; but," with a sudden access of excitement, "you won't marry her!" seizing his hands. "Promise me, promise, Philip, that you won't!"

"It has gone too far now," returned cowardly Philip, casting about for a loophole of escape.

"And you will?" breathlessly, speaking in three short gasps.

To this he merely replied by nodding his head.

"You shan't. You shall die first. You forget the power I have. I will give you to the hangman sooner than to Connie Derwent, a painted Jezabel."

"And why? What do you mean? I say, Valerie, you know this language is rather strong, in a tone of expostulation."

"I told your wife to warn you about Villiani. I shall do my worst. You believe that!" she panted.

"I do you that much justice, Valerie. You would do your worst, my dear, if you could—I'm sure of that; but your teeth are drawn. Villiani is alive; I saw him a week ago," pausing to allow her to taste and digest this bitter morsel.

At this sudden collapse of all her schemes, this taking her weapon and turning it against her—for what might not he and Villiani now reveal!

Madame Bert sat as one turned into stone for

fully three minutes, allowing her parasol to fall unheeded at her feet.

"So you see, my dear Valerie, you are powerless. You cannot prevent the marriage," said Philip, now stooping and carefully replacing her sunshade (though what she wanted with it at such an hour I'm sure I could not say). "I shall be happy in spite of you. You may as well make a virtue of necessity, and be pleasant, and come to the wedding."

Still Madame made no reply. Her brain was reeling, her mind filled with wicked promptings. Oh, how she hated Philip now—Philip, who had cast off his chains, and was free.

"You are sure it was Villiani?" she said at last, in a hoarse whisper.

"I could swear to him. More, I can produce him," he returned, with emphasis. "He swam away that time, and circumstances made it undesirable that he should return, both for him and for you," significantly.

This was a shot that told, an arrow that struck and rankled in her bosom, a gibe that was poison; but now that he had the upper hand, like poor human nature, he meant to have his turn, and to do a little bit of bullying on his own account; but it was a dear, a very costly taunt.

For some seconds they sat immovable, he digging up the turf with his cane, she making up her mind to do it.

The night was falling, the park was gradually emptying, the big trees were in shadow, it was time to be off.

Sir Philip hinted as much, as he tried to catch a view of his watch, and stood up, preparatory to taking his departure.

"Where is your carriage?" he said, looking round, and seeing none.

"Oh, I believe they have taken it away," tying a veil tightly over her face as she spoke. "You might call a hansom! I will drop you at home for the last time."

There was a curious inflexion in her voice as she said this, and, taking his arm and lifting up her parasol, walked away towards the Baywater entrance.

No hansom cab was to be had, only a four-wheeler, and with this Valerie expressed herself contented, as she seated herself on the hard high cushion, and proceeded to draw up the window.

"We will go to your chambers first," she said, "as they are the nearest, and I can go on alone—tell him," pointing to caddy. "And let us drive back through the park, and down by the ladies' mile," she said. "Tell him, Philip; it will be for the last time. And to think of how many—many times we have ridden up and down together, and driven on your coach, and now it's all over," sitting very close to him, and speaking in subdued, tragic accents.

Philip could not find any appropriate words; he could not deny that it was all over, that this was (as far as he could help) their last drive; but he told himself, with deep congratulation, that she was "taking it better than he expected."

That news about Villiani had, to quote his thoughts, "been a regular floorer, and shut her up completely, once for all."

Meanwhile she was fumbling in a side-pocket, and fidgeting about nervously with her hands.

"The very last time, Philip," she repeated tremulously, "is it not?"

"I suppose so," he acquiesced, somewhat awkwardly.

Unhappy man, they were his last words. "She gave you this?" inquired his companion, laying her hand on a flower in his buttonhole as she spoke, and pulling back the lapel of his coat, whilst with stern deliberation she swiftly approached her other hand and buried a poignard in his heart.

A gasping groan, deadened to other ears by the rattling of the cab wheels over some stone, a shuddering sigh, and she was done.

It was his last drive, save that drive which we all must take to the churchyard!

Valerie was as lithe and active as a cat. Her wits were well about her. Her courage rose; she was perfectly cool and collected, had fully weighed all consequences, and fate favoured her.

At a block at a corner turning out of the park

she lightly jumped out and shut the door, leaving the drowsy old cabby unconsciously driving a corpse through the streets.

It was murder; she had committed murder! She did not feel a bit nervous or confused, only strangely excited, and as if she were playing some game—the game was really life and death—her life or death!

She quickly took off her veil and hailed a passing hansom to the neighbourhood of her own carriage left waiting in an opposite direction.

"Fly," she said, "and I will give you a sovereign!" and the man galloped.

The distance was very short, the sovereign easily earned. Next Madame descended and hurried to where her angry servants and frothing horses were still waiting, impatient alike for their supper and their corn.

She was quite collected and apologetic, a wonderful thing, the latter, for her.

"So sorry to keep you waiting so long, Moffat," to her coachman, "but a woman, some kind of professional beggar, in a thick, black veil, kept me talking—talking, and I could not get away from her—so tiresome!" and with this remark she stepped into her Victoria, and was soon rapidly trotting home.

She did not see "murderess, murderess," in letters of fire across all the lamps, nor hear it muttered in the distant roar of the evening traffic.

She had conquered, that was what she felt, and she had escaped. No one knew where she had been—his assignation was likely to be equally a secret. No one knew where he had been.

There were no ugly bloodstains on her hands or on her dress—the poignard left in the wound prevented that, and it was one that no one could recognize as hers—an ancient, very ancient, purchase in an old bric-a-brac shop in Milan, and hitherto kept in a drawer in her dressing-case. How easily it had been done!

She was safe, she told herself, as she walked into the hall, thence up to her boudoir, declared she was tired, and not going to the Countess's soirée, and desired them to send her up some sherry and biscuits.

Her eyes gleamed curiously, her maid thought as she placed a little tray beside her, more like some wild beast of prey, than the eyes of a civilized human being.

She drank off two glasses of Sherry very quickly, an unusual performance on her part, and broke up a biscuit, and told her maid very imperiously "to go."

"She may be tired," quoth that young woman to herself, "but she looks very odd. I never saw her like it before; and how she swallowed down the sherry! What's come to her? What has she been up to now?"

Aye, what indeed!

Who shall picture the scene at Sir Philip's fashionable chambers when the cab drove up containing its ghastly fare!

At first the cabby merely descended and went, as usual, and tore at the bell. The door was duly opened, but no one moved inside the cab!

"I suppose he's asleep," said cabby, wrenching open the door. Still he did not move, and in a voice of great surprise, "I don't see the lady; there was a lady, too. Here you," to the footman in the doorway, "come and give me a hand with the gentleman, I think he is ill, or has fainted or something. Bring a light, will you?"

A light was brought, and showed at once to the two pair of horrified eyes, that Sir Philip was not merely ill—he was dead, he had been murdered.

He lay back in a corner of the cab in a sitting attitude, his eyes open still, but over them already had come the glaze of death; a gilt-handled poignard was sticking in his side, and a few drops of blood had oozed out on his light coat, and the flower stuck so jauntily in his button-hole by Connie's fair, plump fingers.

The first thing was to bring him in, the next for one to run for the police, the other for the nearest doctor.

In an instant the whole house—nay, the whole street—was in a commotion; cabs stopped, people, who had seen the ghastly burden carried in, crowded round the steps.

The doctor came hurrying first—a glance was sufficient.

"Dead an hour, or nearly so."

The news went round the clubs like wildfire, down to the House, to the newspaper offices; it was far and wide over the country in less than no time.

"Murder of a nobleman in a cab."

"Mysterious murder of an M.P."

"Shocking murder of Sir Philip Curzon."

These sentences were printed in big black type on the advertisement boards, and bawled about the streets by the newspaper boys the next morning.

It was a fact, it was perfectly true, no one could deny it; it was no sensational paragraph. A deliberate, cold-blooded murder, committed in the very middle of London, and in a cab, sent a thrill to the souls of the nervous; and so carefully planned, and so neatly executed. The topic took for twenty-four hours the *pas* of all other subjects, war news included.

A woman's hand had struck the blow, the woman in a thick black veil—that the cabby could not swear to—that had vanished the instant the wicked deed was accomplished.

Who was she? Where was she? Ah! that was the question.

Government offered a reward of three hundred pounds for any information from an accomplice not the actual perpetrator of the act.

No one came forward, no one made any sign; this clever woman had no accomplices, and, as to where she was, echo answered, "Where?"

Beyond the fact that it was a woman in black, who wore a black veil, there was not the faintest clue—how many women in black wear black veils?—at least eighty per cent.

It was bidding fair to be another of those crimes, the perpetrators of which walk the earth among their fellow-men red-handed, indeed, but unsuspected, and who seemingly escape all penalty, save that which is exacted by a conscience—a conscience that sears the mind like a red-hot iron—and a memory that becomes as ghastly a companion as though it were the corpse itself.

CHAPTER XXXII.

It was said that the police had a clue to the tragedy, that the matter was being slowly but surely unravelled by careful, steady, and safe hands, and that before long the public would be put in possession of some startling facts.

Valerie Bert read these vague little paragraphs in the morning paper as she sipped her chocolate, with a derisive smile.

She, keen as she was, did not observe how her servants looked at her askance. She did not know that a certain very merry, agreeable "gentleman" who said he was the brother of James, the former footman, had partaken of tea in the servants' hall, and had talked a good deal about the murder, and that he had been quite marked in his attentions to Julia, her maid.

No; Valerie knew nothing of this, and felt perfectly secure.

The murdered man had been buried, the clamour was dying away; his next-of-kin (who came in for all the property) was beginning to understand the consolation that a large balance at one's bankers' affords, and, though garbed in decorous black, was pretty cheerful under the circumstances.

The Derwent family had departed for New York, trousseau and all. Connie was a "bright" girl; it was sure to "come in," and Connie, posed as Niobe, just for the present, and for as long as she was in black.

The tragic fate of her lover, and her deep mourning robes gave her an air of the deepest and most romantic interest to all callers in Fifty-Fifth Avenue.

She was quite a lion in her way. Her grief was moderate, fearless, and becoming, and we have no doubt whatever but that some day she will be consoled, although she has very substantial souvenirs of the late Sir Philip in her dressing-

case; and although her deportment at the funeral was a marvellous representation of the "inconsolable," even the cynical Mr. Loraine was struck with a faint tinge of pity and amazement.

He was struck with a great deal more amazement when, one day, hearing that a gentleman in the visitor's room at the club was waiting to see him.

He went there, and found no less a person than his *bête noir*, the Count de Bodisco. Probably his surprise was depicted in legible letters on his face, for the Count hastened to say,—

"You are amazed to see me, of course, my dear sir! But nothing less than matters of deep importance with regard to our mutual friend, Lady Curzon, would tempt me thus to trespass uninvited on your time. Where is she?"

"Monsieur le Comte must have been a long time absent if he is not aware that for nearly two years Lady Curzon has been missing, and is believed to be dead—drowned in crossing the Atlantic on board the *Vanessa*," returned Mr. Loraine, very stiffly.

"Dead—impossible," rejoined the Count, suddenly seating himself in a big arm-chair. "Impossible. What does it all mean? I only came to London this morning. I had business with her now—at once," speaking rapidly. "This is a blow!"—beating himself on the chest—"a blow—a terrible blow"—delivering one on his breast-bone at each reiteration of the word, whilst Mr. Loraine looked on with a cold, contemptuous countenance. "Tell me all about it—quickly," continued the Count, excitedly. "How, when, where, did it happen, and what has become of her money?"

In a few brief sentences Mr. Loraine related Pauline's visit to Mount Rivers, her sudden mysterious disappearance, the search, the conclusion arrived at by the detective, and the notable fact that her amiable sisters were now in the full enjoyment of the Russian fortune.

During this recital the usually impassive Count continued to beat his breast and to mutter ejaculations in a strange, harsh, foreign language.

"I marvel very greatly, Count," continued Mr. Loraine, "that a man who goes about as much as you do, who lives in the world, and who was such a friend and adviser to Lady Curzon, should remain totally ignorant of such a matter, an affair that was in everybody's mouth for two whole years!"

"There is a reason for that, between you and me, my dear sir!" hurriedly rising and seizing his host by the button of his coat. "A reason not to go abroad, you understand; for it would not sound well—a reason that will explain all to you. *Sans phrase!* I was in prison!"

At this brief announcement his companion started and stepped back a pace, though still held by the other's well-shaped white hand.

"You need not be alarmed, most virtuous of men! It was nothing. It was not murder or forgery; it was only politics! But I am a Russian. I have been in prison for two years for sentiments as mild as half your men in Parliament utter daily, and are applauded. You see it in your paper loud cheers; with us it is different. I am under supervision now! I am suspected—you understand!"

"Of what?" demanded the other, laconically.

"Of Nihilist proclivities!" drawing down the corners of his mouth.

"And are you a Nihilist?"

"Do I look like one? Do I look like belonging to a secret society?" he exclaimed, with a gesture of virtuous repudiation. "I am no more one than Lady Curzon. Will that content you, on my solemn word of honour!"

"It is no affair of mine, and as to Lady Curzon, why bring in her name!" said Mr. Loraine, coldly. "They say she is dead."

"If she is dead the sisters must disgorge her fortune!" said the Count, beginning to pace the room with short, quick strides.

"Easier said than done. Once it gets into Villiani's clutches your chance of recovering it is small!" rejoined the other coolly.

"Villiani!" said the Count, suddenly stopping short. "The rascal is dead!"

"If he is, which I venture to doubt, he has left a twin-brother in his place seven times worse than himself!"

"How? Explain. Villiani was unique! Well for society that he was! He had no relations—none. Where is this twin-brother? Where is he to be seen?" speaking through his teeth.

Mr. Lorraine, who had never let him out of his sight, had much sincere satisfaction in now giving his address to the Count.

"Ha! ha! we shall see," said the Russian, with a fierce laugh. "We shall see this twin-brother. Snake! did you think to escape Ivan Bodisco—traitor! informer! villain!"

Evidently the intelligence about Villiani moved him a good deal, even more than the news of Lady Curzon's death.

He continued to wear out the club carpet at a great rate, pacing up and down the room, whilst Mr. Lorraine stood with his back to the fireplace and surveyed him with the same dispassionate curiosity as he would accord to some new variety of animal in the Zoological Gardens.

"I have it all here!" exclaimed the Count, suddenly clenching his fist and placing it against his forehead. "All—all—all. Would you hear it!" turning interrogatively to his quiet companion, who, making a low, ironical bow, responded,—

"As you please."

"If Villiani is alive, be, and he alone, has made away with or murdered Lady Curzon! His hands have been free whilst I was shut up within four walls," clenching his fists as he spoke, "and he is capable of anything."

Mr. Lorraine was startled out of his complete composure to observe how his own suspicions were so immediately and decisively endorsed by the agitated little man before him.

He did not look like the same person whom he had casually met and instinctively avoided in Parisian salons little more than two years previously.

The bland, polished, courteous, silky enamoured Count was transformed (at any rate, for the present) into an excitable, infuriated, reckless, semi-lunatic.

Which was it that preyed most on his mind, Mr. Lorraine asked himself—the loss of the lady, or the loss of the lady's money?

"It is as plain as what you call a pikestaff!" burst out Bodisco, now mopping his forehead. "She, you say, went down there to Mount Rivers with money, and alone. He met her, also alone, and she has never been seen since! It is all explained—all easily understood. His infatuated old wife was her heir. A child could read that riddle! He has her money! But it shall be snatched from his greedy hands! He knows what became of Pauline. I will go to him myself this very night, and tear the secret from his vile bosom!" stamping up and down as he spoke, enforcing his words violently.

He did not seem to care for the presence of the other, as he gesticulated thus, and talked to himself rapidly, in hurried, foreign accents.

"He is in my power. Ah!" he muttered, at length, in English, "little does he guess that Ivan Bodisco is on his track and has his address!" waving the envelope that Mr. Lorraine had given him. "By this time to-morrow I shall know what has become of Pauline."

"I hope you will permit me to share the intelligence," said his companion, with unconcealed eagerness.

"Ah! yes, yes," nodding his head with a touch of his old irritating condescension. "But the news is more important to me than anyone."

"To you? and why?" in a very frosty tone.

"For several very good reasons, my dear young man."

"Could you not impart one of them?" sarcastically.

"Well, if you make a point of it, I don't mind," with an air of generous concession. "You shall hear, as you have given me this," once more excitedly waving the paper in his hand. "One reason is that Lady Curzon, Pauline, what you will, and I hold between us a

secret that no one in the world shares but ourselves! Will that suffice?"

"It will suffice," returned Mr. Lorraine, speaking with a great effort.

So now he understood why this pale-eyed, hateful Russian was at Pauline's hotel, at all times and seasons.

He would not in his own mind slander her (it might be dead) memory; but for her to share a secret with such a man made the image of Pauline that he had raised in his mind reel upon its pedestal.

Another such shock, and his ideal would be in fragments.

"My business is easy—a hansom and to Villiani," said the Count, making a sudden swoop upon his hat. "*Au revoir*. You shall see me to-morrow," and without another word he tore open the door, dashed down the club steps, jumped into a hansom, and disappeared. Nemesis was on his way to Lorenzo Villiani at last!

And Nemesis is on his way to another individual—no less a person than Madame Bert, who, lying on her satin sofa in a soft-embroidered robe de chambre, lazily looking through a bad French novel, has no idea that he is already, nay, at that very moment, standing in the lobby, with his hand on the lock of her door, holding a whispered colloquy with the pale, frightened-looking Julia.

It has been a very nice interesting "case." Julia has been charming. Her little suppers downstairs Mr. Detective will remember with affection long after he has forgotten her.

In this case he has been so fortunate as to combine business and pleasure, and he hopes that the manner in which he has ferreted out this very neat "job" will make his professional fortune, and no doubt it will.

The door opened cautiously, and Julia, in a tremulous voice, said,—

"Please, Madame, there's a person wishes to speak to you."

"What, what?" irritably. "I'm not going to see any one to-day. Tell them to tell you their business, and don't worry me."

"He says it's important, and that he must see you," gasped Julia, backing out of the room as Detective Spry boldly entered the apartment, hat in hand.

"Madame Bert, I believe!" rubbing his forehead with his red handkerchief.

"Yes; and what do you mean by this intrusion, sir? This is my private room," half sitting up as she spoke. "Leave it at once—this instant!" quoth Valerie, in a passion.

"Presently, Madame, when I've told you my business," he replied, with perfectly unmoved composure, and seating himself.

"Here!" snatching at the bell, "Julia, Sophia, Jones!" she screamed, "send for the police. Turn this man out."

But Julia was quaking outside on the stairs, knowing very well that two policemen were sitting in the hall already, and that a cab was waiting at the door for her miserable mistress—her guilty, wicked mistress.

"Madame," said Spry, now approaching her chair, "you will have heard of the murder of Sir Philip Curzon in a cab. He was a great friend of yours," eyeing her steadily.

She made no reply, but gazed fixedly at her interlocutor with her great big metallic-looking eyes.

"You were with him the evening he was murdered," he continued, slowly. "He met you at the round pond."

"It's—it's a lie!" she screamed, in a shrill voice.

"No, no, it's true; you were seen. Your carriage was kept waiting a good long way off. You went away with him in a cab, wearing a black veil—this," producing the article in question.

"You jumped out of the four-wheeler, and called a hansom; returned to your servants with a trumped-up excuse. Every link is at last complete. You dropped a pencil-case in the cab. Ah, you never missed it. It was just the link we wanted. It has been sworn to, your absence is sworn to, the veil is sworn to, the dagger is sworn to. Servants are curious, inquisitive people. You left your dressing-case open some-

times, and now," producing a paper, and holding it before her livid face and starting eye-balls, "I arrest you. This is a magistrate's warrant. I arrest you, Madame Valerie Bert, for the murder of Sir Philip Curzon, on the evening of the twenty-fourth of last July!"

Valerie had not felt any great qualms about the murder. She had absolutely no conscience. Remorse had no existence in her mental fabric, and she had felt herself completely secure, had even acted her part to admiration, and discussed the tragedy with duly expressed horror, feeling at the moment that the act had been committed by some other person—not herself.

It had been done so quickly there had been nothing ghastly for her mind to dwell on; merely a little push with a sharp knife. She saw nothing. It was almost dusk, and she had jumped out without "looking."

At times she declared to herself that she had not done it; at others, that she had, and was glad, frightfully glad!

But here was another prospect—this stern-looking man, with keen eyes, closely-shaven chin, and rough, coarse hands, reading out a warrant for her arrest! She trembled in every limb.

Already, ah, how rapidly, the vista opened itself out. The crowded dock, the prison cell, the last awful scene when she stood alone above the drop! She had a vivid imagination, though she knew neither pity or remorse.

"You must come with me," said this hateful man with the hard, coarse hands. "Get a few things together," he added, imperatively, "the cab's waiting."

"For what?" she cried, hysterically.

"Why, for you. Here, we need not mince matters, you are going to gaol. Look sharp, ma'm. Julia, Julia, come here and get the lady ready at once. Fetch her bonnet and shawl; there's no time to lose."

And Mr. Spry told himself that he was not going to waste any soft words on yonder red-headed Jezebel, who had murdered a man in a manner that, for cold-blooded audacity, was unparalleled in all his professional experience, and who, he hoped, would "swing."

But Madame declined to go, first with passionate shrieks, and expostulations, and denunciations, and then with all her might and main she flung herself prone on the floor, and absolutely refused to move.

But this was no obstacle to Mr. Spry; move she would and should, if not by persuasion, at least by force.

What a spectacle she presented to her servants, who felt themselves ashamed and humiliated as they saw her borne downstairs by two burly policemen, clinging rantically at the banisters, and screaming hysterically at every step, and finally deposited in the cab, with the blinds quickly drawn down, and driven swiftly away.

"Taken up for the murder of Sir Philip Curzon," it was whispered by those who saw the limp and struggling figure carried down the steps.

And thus, in the very same way, and almost at the very self-same hour, did slow but sure-footed Justice lay its iron hand on both these wicked wretches who had thrived and prospered for so long, Madame Bert and Lorenzo Villiani.

As the cab bore her away, now in a dead faint, to the precincts of Pentonville, a hansom was just depositing Count Bodisco on the door-step of the unsuspecting Villiani, who, with half-closed eyes, and a cigar between his teeth, in feasting his mental vision on his large balance at his bankers, and wondering how soon it will be "safe" for him to return to the sunny cities of Italy, and the ever-fascinating halls of Monte Carlo.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AND now to return to Pauline (who is in the land of the living, as no one has for a moment doubted, all this time), or, rather, to return to Villiani, after his sudden meeting with her in the avenue.

He had been drinking considerably when he met her, and after she left him he disposed o

neerly half a bottle of raw brandy, his usual sedative when his mind had been unpleasantly disturbed, the result of which potations were to render him more like an infuriated, half mad creature, than anything loose from Broadmoor.

He had two ideas still left in his head, a hatred of Pauline, and a wish to do her some injury.

In this terrible frame of mind he lay in wait for her in the avenue, and felled her to the earth, as we have seen.

He then dragged her through the bushes to a lonely brake, where there was no chance of her being discovered, and, feeling somewhat sobered by his late performance, staggered home to his wife and Carrie.

His wild appearance and bloodshot eyes were no novel spectacle to these wretched women, who, as he threw himself into a chair and glared at them alternately, thought to appease him with a glowing description of Pauline's visit, and a display of that ever-pleasing object, nice, new crisp Bank of England notes and shining golden sovereigns.

But for once they utterly failed in their effect. He pushed Mattie and the money savagely away, and ordered her to bring brandy and a tumbler, and to "look sharp!"

He was going to take them into his confidence (what a confidence!)—he must, since they had seen Pauline—and required a further allowance of his curse to nerve him to the speaking point. Expostulations only brought blows, as Mattie knew by years of experience. It would be vain to hint that he had "had enough already," so she meekly obeyed his behest, and set the bottle and glass before him on the table, and retired to a discreetly distant seat.

"You say she was here," he said after a pause; "with her charity and her confounded airs, and her few paltry notes. She won't come here again in a hurry," taking a tremendous pull at the brandy as he spoke.

"Oh! I don't know that," put in Carrie, timidly; "she said something about staying at the inn to-night, and coming here again to-morrow. She wants us to go away—to leave this. She means to make us a good allowance; she said she would settle it all to-morrow, when she came."

"I tell you she'll never come here again," shouted Villaini. "Don't contradict your betters—she will never come here or anywhere else again."

What did he mean—did he know what he was saying? thought both his companions, with a strange thrill of apprehension. For nearly five minutes there was silence; they were absolutely afraid to speak—afraid to ask—afraid to know the worst.

At length Villaini broke the silence most effectually.

"She is dead!" he said, in a hoarse voice, setting down his now empty tumbler with a crash that sent it flying over the carpet in a hundred splinters.

"How! Why, she was here at six o'clock—how did she die?" faltered Mattie with pale lips that could scarcely articulate, and trembling in every joint of her bony body.

"I'll tell you—you may as well know, sooner or later—a wife's evidence cannot be taken against her husband. I killed her with this stick," producing his accompanying club as he spoke, and shaking it significantly.

Carrie, who had been surveying her brother-in-law, with her usually prominent eyes nearly bursting from their sockets, gave one gasping scream, and fell forward, flat on the floor, in a dead faint; the thud of her fall resounded through the room.

"Never mind, let her lie," said Villaini, ferociously; "good thing if she was dead too! I hit her, that young one, on the head. She fell at once, like a stone—not a word—not a sound. I've hid her in the black grove, and by-and-bye, Mattie, you must come out and help me to bury her. She will never be missed. You say she came in of herself, no one saw her—you must be sure you never saw her. When it's all hushed up, and the hubbub over, we will move off. Her money comes to you."

"Oh! Lorenzo. Oh! Lorenzo," was all his

miserable wife could say, as she knelt over her sister, wringing her hands. "I wish you'd kill me, and have done with it—it would be a mercy."

"If you say much I will," he muttered, savagely; "and throw you into the river. I did not mean to settle her all out, only just to give her a knock on the head, and take down her airs. What thin skulls you women have! How was I to know it would kill her," in an aggrieved tone. "Here, bring that creature to, and be ready for what you know—it must be done," and with this announcement, her lord and master lounged out of the room unsteadily taking the bottle with him.

Presently Carrie came to, and what an awakening was hers!

These two wretched women had a liking for one another—in all their triumphs, in all their schemes, in all their reverses, they had held together—but never had they been called upon to confront anything like this—this crime that Villaini had so brutally revealed in all its horrible nakedness. Murder, possibly unpremeditated, but still murder.

Forgery they had winked at, cheating they were not unacquainted with, drunkenness was their daily companion, but this went beyond all.

They sat together, holding each other, and trembling and crying and reiterating—

"Oh! what are we to do!—what are we to do!"

Denounce Lorenzo! No; what good could it possibly do to her now! And it would mean ruin to them, as much as they could be ruined any further.

They talked, and talked, and wept until nearly nine o'clock, and there was no sign of Villaini returning to call Mattie to share his horrible task.

What did it mean? It simply meant that he was now stretched asleep in the room above in a state of drunken stupefaction oblivious of the body in the black grove, and of everything else.

What was to be done? the two women asked each other, looking into each other's ghastly faces and frightened eyes with horrified interrogation.

It could not be left there all night, yet who was to bury it! Supposing some poacher (and there were many who nightly haunted the neglected preserves of Mount Rivers) was to come across it, and loudly and promptly proclaim his dreadful discovery.

They themselves must go, and yet how reluctantly they shrank from the necessity—how they debated and lingered can easily be understood.

There was no hope that Villaini would move before morning, and meanwhile what possibilities opened before them! They shivered as they sat.

"We ought—at least, I ought to denounce him," said Carrie, for the tenth time; "it is as bad as if I did it myself, hiding it, and it's sure to be discovered, sooner or later. Murder will out."

"Not always," rejoined her sister, "and it was not meant for murder, he said so." Even now she would screen the wretch.

"Who would believe what he said! Not a soul—not I, at any rate. It's my belief that he meant it most fully, and it's my belief that if we huddle up the matter, and screen him, she won't rest easy in her grave, she'll haunt us till we do speak."

The words had scarcely left her lips when there was a fumbling noise outside the door, as of some one vainly groping for the handle groping in vain.

"Hush—ah," whispered Carrie, clutching her companion convulsively by the arm; "did you hear that!"

"Yes; it's only old Susan coming to shut up the house."

And the door-handle rattled again, the door was pushed very gently open, and, in the dim twilight, revealed their sister Pauline—her face ghastly, her dress torn, her hair dishevelled, her hat all shapeless.

Was it really her, or her ghost? Her appear-

ance would give colour to the latter supposition, as she stood at the other side of the table, now motionless, gazing at her relations with a blank, expressionless face, and wide-open, lack lustre eyes.

Mattie and Carrie shrank together, bereft, for the moment, of the power of speech, staring with horrified, fascinated orbs on the figure that had so unexpectedly joined them.

At last Mattie took heart of grace, remembering in some dim way that spirits were said to disappear if addressed by the living.

"Pauline," she stammered, in a faint voice; "what brings you here!"

But Pauline made no answer; she only sat down, and, putting her hand to her head, moaned faintly.

Madame Villaini had now another and desperate venture in her mind—candles!

She rose, and with shaking fingers, lit two composite ones that were on the chimney-piece, and turned round quickly to view the effect.

Pauline was still there. She began, with a wild jump of her heart, to believe now that what she saw before her was not a denizen of another world, but a living woman; and, acting under this impression, she valiantly approached her sister, candle in hand.

Yes, it was Pauline. Her face was pale as death, there was a streak of blood on her forehead, her hands and wrists were scratched and torn as if by bushes, and her thin black dress fell around her in rags.

"Then he had not killed her after all," was Mattie's next thought, as she drew a sigh of unutterable relief; but looking again into her half-sister's face, one would say that, if he had not taken her life, he had most unmistakably deprived her of reason. No sane or sensible woman had ever such a blank and vacant face.

To Mattie's and Carrie's urgent inquiries they elicited no answer—merely a shaking of the head, and low moans and sighs.

Removing her hat, this condition was accounted for by traces of a violent blow on the back of her head, near the crown, and as Carrie put aside the battered hat, she nodded mysteriously to her sister, and said—

"That saved her."

"Yes, saved her; but unless I'm greatly mistaken," she returned, in a low voice, "the brain is injured, and she is an idiot for life."

"Well, anything is better than what we thought," rejoined her companion, consolingly; "and the next thing to consider is, what are we to do with her? How can we account for having her here in this state! How did it happen—when they ask!"

"A fall!" suggested Mattie, dubiously.

"A fall—no," contemptuously; "a doctor could tell at a glance that it was no fall, but a blow."

"She seems deaf and dumb," remarked her sister; "but deaf and dumb or not we must get her away before morning, and before old Susan discovers her here."

"That's all very fine, but how! What have you thought of?"

Her sister gave her the answer in one word, and seemingly the answer was satisfactory, the word "Phoebe."

"Yes, Phoebe will keep her and be as silent as the grave, until we know what to do. You see, we can make it worth her while now. Phoebe was always our partizan, and, anyway, she would do a good deal for a ten-pound note."

"But how are you to get her to Shingle-side?" objected Carrie.

"Easily—quite simply," replied Mattie, whose nerves and courage had risen with the occasion, and who now developed a talent for planning and plotting that was quite a revelation to her younger sister.

"And who is to take her!" she demanded impatiently.

"He shall," jerking her head, upwards as she spoke, "in the boat."

"In the boat!" echoed the other, in a tone of respectful admiration. "Of course, how clever of you to think of it. It leaves no wheel marks, and requires no driver, like a horrid fly, but I'm

afraid it's not safe—it has not been used or ages."

"It does not matter—it's the only resource and it will have to be safe. And now we've had enough of thinking and talking, the next thing is to act. First of all give her a little sherry—there is half a bottle in the locker in the next room, and then let us take her upstairs, bind her head, wash her hands and face, and let her lie down, whilst I wake him."

This latter intention caused Carrie to stare at her sister with a face of blank interrogation.

Carrie herself would just have soon have set about rousing a royal Bengal tiger lately sated with a meal.

"He must be roused," said Mattie, with much determination, "even if it comes to throwing a jug of water over him. I'll just give him another hour. It will be time enough if they leave here at twelve o'clock. Whatever happens she must not be found here," raising with one arm the inanimate figure in the chair, whilst Carrie, in answer to a sign from her manning elder, took the other.

They raised their step-sister upright between them, and she mechanically walked in the middle, sustained by them on either side, looking like an animated statue or a piece of clockwork, as, supported in this manner, she was led slowly from the room.

The energetic Matilda, roused to her full powers (such as they were) by the emergency of the occasion, having bound up the wound in Pauline's head, clothed her in one of her own garments (long, long fallen from its former greatness), and forced a few teaspoonfuls of sherry between her tightly-closed teeth, set about the most difficult and dangerous part of her task—awakening her husband.

She managed this effectually by oversetting a heavy table in this vicinity, and when with curses he would have turned over once more she approached with a basin of water in her hand and a sponge, and said very imperatively,—

"Wake up, Lorenzo. Your life depends on it. Wake up! wake up!"

Lorenzo did wake up at this summons, and blinked at his partner for a few seconds in speechless stupidity.

"You remember last night, the black grove—Pauline?" proceeded Mattie, volubly.

"Yes"—evidently he remembered, for he sprang out of bed with great alertness and said, "What, have they found her already?"

"Calm yourself. She is alive—she is here," said his wife impressively. "Be quick and sponge your head, and be ready to do what I want."

"What you want?" scoffingly, but plunging his face into the basin, "that would be something quite new, eh? And it was only a little tap, after all," he added, with an air of undoubted relief.

"No, Lorenzo," said his wife, gravely. "Although she is alive, and actually walked here, I'm afraid her reason is gone. She seems neither to feel, or hear, or see. She is like a person in a cataleptic trance. Her brain is injured. I believe she will be an idiot for life."

"And what's your plan?—what's to be done?" he asked, impatiently. "Don't sit jawing here all night."

"No, I won't; time is precious. We must keep the matter quiet. No one knows she came here—no one is to know."

"Sacre bleu! I should think not!" emphatically.

"I thought of sending her to Phoebe till the fume is all over, or till she gets better. We can make up some story then, when we have plenty of time to think it over—the present is the critical moment. It will never do for her to be found here with that mark on her head. I thought if you would take her down the river in the boat—it's fifteen miles to Shingle-side, but it's twenty-five by road—no one will see you, and you can leave her with Phoebe before the people are up. Tell Phoebe she got into a scrape, or a railway accident, or whatever you like. Give her this ten-pound note, promise her more, and she will be as mute as—as Pauline herself. You can trump up some story."

"It's a good idea," said the Count, scratching his head. "Not bad for you. Let's have a look at her," seizing the candle. "Where is she?"

"In Carrie's room," following him across the corridor.

"I am afraid to be with her alone!" exclaimed Carrie, as they entered. "She looks like a corpse with its eyes open. She never has moved since you left, Mattie. Can she be dead?" in an awestruck key.

"Dead! Not she," returned the shameless Lorenzo, flashing the candle before the eyes of his victim. "But her mind is gone. Yes, there's no doubt of that. Well, Mattie, if she goes to-night she is never heard of again, you will remember that. She disappears. Phoebe will keep her, and, unless I'm mistaken, Earlswood Asylum will be her future residence, or something in the same line. I believe, as you say, her reason is gone. She is morally dead," holding the candle up a little higher, and surveying her coolly. "I'm sorry I hit so hard. I can't say more," with the air of a person making a handsome concession, and his wife quite accepted it as such. "Anyhow, Mattie," speaking with increased animation, "you're her heir. Our poor days are over. There's a great deal of spending in that Russian fortune, and dumb women tell no tales. Get her ready, and give me a coat and a nip of brandy, and I'm your man."

"No; no brandy," returned Mattie, with great determination. "It would ruin everything. You shall have it when you come back. Think of what there is at stake. Are you mad, Lorenzo?"

And Lorenzo, grumbling and muttering, drew on a shabby top-coat without further delay, and taking a small lantern and a box of matches set out through the long, dark grass of the pleasure-ground for the rotten, tumbledown boat-house among the reeds.

He had some difficulty in effecting an entrance at first, and had, of course, forgotten the key, but after a few kicks the crazy old door gave way; and in about ten minutes the boat herself was launched, oars and all, and pushed out on the black water, on which Lorenzo's little bull's-eye lantern threw strange, weird streams of light, making the shadows look deeper, the trees more spectral, and the whole scene as weird and grim as it was possible to imagine.

Presently Matilda and Carrie arrived stealthily leading Pauline between them, wrapped in an old shawl, and moving like an animated lay figure.

They seated her in the stern of the boat, stepped out themselves, and helped to shove it off, and then stood on the steps of the moist boat-house, the black water lapping the steps at their feet, listening to the rise and fall of Lorenzo's oars in the rowlocks till they became fainter and fainter, and finally died away altogether in the darkness, into which he and his unfortunate freight had long disappeared.

And then the two ladies gathered their petticoats tightly round them, and returned to the house, to seek what repose they could find after the extraordinary and exciting events that had been enacted by them and theirs that August day.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EARLY in the dawn two figures—strangers—might be seen walking up the beach at Shingle-side, a small fishing-village at the mouth of the Brawl.

A man with the collar of his coat well pulled up about his ears, the brim of his felt hat drawn well down over his forehead, and the mere tip of a decidedly red nose, being the only feature that "braved the morning air."

The woman with him was tall and slight, dressed in a faded cashmere garment that had once been fine, and with a dark plaid shawl drawn over her head.

She walked slowly, leaning on the man's arm. Her hands were white, but covered with recent scratches, and she wore a broad wedding-ring.

They came at length to Phoebe's house, a small cottage with a thatched roof, two windows at either side of the grass-green hall-door, which you

descended two steps to reach, and with a small garden and bleaching-green at the back.

The blinds were down—it was but five o'clock, and though many boats were already away to sea Phoebe Patterson never stirred herself till seven (or even eight o'clock), having contracted these lazy habits in the good old days at Mount Rivers under Mrs. Tagg.

Lorenzo knocked gently, then smartly, then imperiously, and at last brought Mrs. Patterson to the door, wrapped in a counterpane, with tangled hair and bare feet.

Her indignant expostulations with imagined "tramps and beggars" were cut short by the husband of her former mistress, who pushed his way promptly into the sitting-room, drawing his companion after him, and depositing her on the corner of the very hard horsehair sofa that was one of the chief ornaments of what Mrs. Patterson complacently considered "a very genteel" apartment.

"Just allow me, sir, to throw on a tack of clothes," said Phoebe, darting back into her bower, thrusting up her frizzled locks under a cap, and investing herself in slippers and dress, and reappearing on the scene, spurred by curiosity and excitement, in a marvellously short space of time, employed by Lorenzo in looking round for something to drink.

"What's the matter, sir?" she panted, as she took a seat (was it not her own house?) and gaped at Villaini, with a hand on either knee.

"Lady Curzon, here, is out of her mind; we want to keep it quiet, and to leave her with you," he returned, with promptitude and clearness. "And," seeing her face of inquiry, "we will make it well worth your while," producing and tossing over a neatly-folded ten-pound note.

This note, Phoebe, who adored money, deliberately opened and looked at before answering. Yes! it was a good one, she could see; and with this tangible bit of paper in her hand she was quite prepared to discuss the question in the most friendly and sympathetic spirit.

"Ten pounds a-month, Phoebe," he continued, knowing her weakness, and having laid all his plans and schemes during his long silent row in the dark.

"She is your cousin, you'll remember; come from London, bothered in her mind from a fall she got from a cart; last situation was ladies'-maid," involuntarily glancing at Pauline's white shapely hands.

"Yes, I see sir."

"Ladies'-maid; her name is Polly Carson, she is not married; you'll not forget!"

"Yes, sir, I'll not forget."

"And she is to see no one. Keep her in this room or in the back garden, it's sheltered; or if she does go out, she goes out with you. You had better call in the village doctor if you have one."

"Oh! laws, sir, in course we have—a 'pothecary'."

"Let him examine her head. A fall, you know, quite recently, and I'll wait and hear what he says about her mind. If it's likely to be tedious, why—"

"Yes, sir," rather breathlessly, and thinking of her promised ten pounds a month. She had already added up the little sum—one hundred and twenty pounds a-year. Riches! Adorable prospect!

"If it's tedious she must only go to the county asylum; of course, as your niece," said Lorenzo, demolishing her castles in the air with one fell stroke.

At this announcement Phoebe's face fell, her rosy visions faded, her expression lost its expanding smiles, and grew stern.

Why, she asked herself, should she be made a cat's-paw of? Maybe she'd only get this one ten pounds; no more. No, no, that would not do; that would not pay. She had never liked Pauline. As a child she was a torment and a drawback to her own flirtations, in her later Cinderella days she had been proud, independent, and "stand offish." All the same if she was going to be the means of keeping her out of her sisters' way it should not be for a paltry ten pounds.

Phoebe was very keen about money. She knew that Pauline herself was rich.

Did they mean to collar thousands, she asked herself, with rising indignation, and put her off with next to nothing?—she, who would have all the trouble and all the risk?

Lorenzo, the crafty (and at present sober), saw perfectly well what was working in her mind, and was not unprepared when, with a kind of accession of virtuous dignity, Mrs. Patterson placed the money on the table, and pushed it towards him, saying,—

"Thank you, sir, but I couldn't; it could not be done, it really could not, no ways."

"Name your terms," he replied, concisely.

"Well, since you put it like that I don't mind if I do," she said, with agreeable frankness.

"In the first place, I must know for a fact"—she did not say fact—"the whole circumstances of the case, and how she became like that," pointing; "if her husband knows of it, and why you are so anxious to bring her here and hide her?"

Lorenzo grew a shade paler as he listened to this excessively plain speaking, but he nodded his head in token of assent.

"Next, if your lady, Miss Mattie, comes in for money by this I must have a yearly allowance, whether I keep Miss Pauline or no, asylum or no asylum—a sum not less than one hundred and fifty pounds a year," looking at him steadily as she spoke.

"Great goodness, woman, you must be mad!" broke in Lorenzo in a frenzy.

"No, no, I'm not mad—no fear of me; them's my terms, you can take them or leave them. I'm thinking you have been at the bottom of the business," nodding her head, significantly, towards the rigid figure on the sofa; "but I'll not force myself on any one's confidence. I don't want no ugly secrets."

The last sentence was a threat; at least, so Lorenzo interpreted it. He became paler and paler.

This hateful red-faced creature sitting there, with her mottled arms akimbo, had him in her power, and knew it. And she was his only resource—he must accept her terms.

How could he take Pauline back?—how account for his errand? Even he, the matchless schemer and intriguer, was completely at his wits' end for once.

Who shall describe the ensuing scene of bargaining?—a scene that would positively have done credit to the slave market at Constantinople, or to a pair of keen hands chaffering over a horse.

The innocent object of so much argument, eloquence, persuasion on one hand, and coy, ill-dissembled reluctance on the other, was now totally unconscious on the sofa; her head had fallen back, the shawl had slipped down, her great dazed looking dark eyes were closed at last.

And the other very wide-awake pair continued their fencing, almost totally oblivious of her presence.

Phoebe carried the day, unquestionably; having been ceded an inch she clamoured for an ell.

"One hundred and fifty!"

"No, that would not see her through—secrets were wearing things—there would be a heap more work to be got through now; she wasn't over and above strong—and to this announcement her burly figure and her ruddy cheeks gave the lie direct—and she must keep a girl."

"Say two hundred a year, paid quarterly," insinuatingly, "and she would say 'done.'"

Lorenzo felt indignation hot within him; he was being done, he told himself, endeavouring to master his rising feelings, but it was a case of Hobson's choice, and making a virtue of necessity he closed the bargain.

It will naturally be thought that great a villain as he was Phoebe was running him close—Phoebe, the lazy, the good-tempered, the apple-cheeked!

What had changed her into a grasping, mercenary, unprincipled elderly woman? Twenty

years for one thing, and Jones, the butler, for the other.

Jones, the gay deceiver, had dallied with her affections for over seven years; marriage had been postponed from time to time, until their joint savings entitled them to aspire to a "public."

The day was named, Phoebe got a very superior outfit—a box crammed with new clothes, a black silk dress, and a lovely bonnet.

She gave up her place, not Mount Rivers, for the family were at that time touring abroad under the Count's auspices.

She named her bridesmaids, purchased the cake and half a dozen silver teaspoons; in short, they were within a week of the wedding, when she received a scrawl from Jones, saying—

"DEAR PHOEBE,

"This is to inform you as I'm off to Liverpool, and I'm going to marry Katie Keen of the 'Blue Boar.' She has a tidy bit of money, and your little stocking is not up to the mark required by, yours truly,

"WILLIAM JONES."

This, needless to say, was a woeful shock to Phoebe, after all her years of patient angling, and then of patient waiting.

It was inexcusable on William's part, but his apology was Katie, who was plump and pretty; his defection made his forsaken sweetheart a prematurely hard, elderly woman.

Her heart was dead, her only desire money, to gain, to glean, to pick up money, that she might crush and abuse and trample on her recreant lover, and thrust her well filled stocking in his face.

To this end she once more went to service, to wait on an elderly lady. Into the affections of the elderly lady she wound herself, and made such rapid steps in her goodgraces as to be named for a very cosy little legacy in her will.

On this and on savings Phoebe felt justified in returning into private life, to her own native place, which happened to be also the residence of William Jones and his rapidly-increasing family.

No matter where he lived she had made up her mind to live near him, that he might meditate daily on what he had lost, for Kate was slatternly, extravagant, and according to her neighbours, prone to "let the house go out of the windows."

"Aye," quoth the excellent Phoebe, "he'll have to work in earnest now. Something different to cleaning spoons and uncorking port wine, and standing over John Thomas—for William was a greengrocer, and had a hard struggle to keep up appearances and pay his way."

Doubtless he cast more than one regretful glance at his old flame Phoebe, and her comfortable cottage, and her banking account. Who shall say?

To have a two-storied house with a brass knocker and venetian blinds, a girl to open the door, and a sealkin jacket to envelope her very stout person had long been the distant and doubtful object of Phoebe's ambition.

She felt in her heart that to see her thus exalted would kill Kitty Jones. She could not fail to die of envy.

And as she sat in her horsehair chair, her hands on her knees, listening to the Count, all these dazzling visions and the final extinction of her rival and probable suicide of Jones, became immediate possibilities.

(To be continued.)

CHINESE junks and boats have eyes carved or painted on the bows, which are usually supposed to be a mere fanciful form of ornamentation. But they have a real meaning, as a recent traveller found. In going up one of the rivers from Ningpo, he was startled one day by seeing a boatman seize his broad hat and clap it over one of the "eyes" of the boat, while other boats on the stream were similarly blinded. Looking about for an explanation, he saw a dead body floating past, and he was told by the boatman that if the boat had been allowed to "see" it, some disaster would surely have happened either to passengers or crew before the voyage ended.

ROSALIND'S TEMPTATION.

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(Continued from page 489.)

By the side of the bed sat Verschoyle, ready to attend to the invalid's slightest want.

"Collin, old boy, you look considerably done up," said Murray, after a long pause, during which his eyes had been fixed on his host's face while his thin fingers plucked restlessly at the bedclothes, "you have been dancing attendance too much on me. You'll be getting ill yourself next."

"No danger of that. I'm as strong as a horse, and have never had a day's illness in my life," rejoined Verschoyle cheerfully. "You must not judge by appearances."

"That's true in more respects than one. Well, you've acted a good part by me, and although I'm not particularly grateful by nature I'm ready to admit the warming properties of the coals of fire you have heaped on my head."

"It's little enough I have been able to do for you, Murray," was the hasty reply.

"Pretty well, considering that I had done you one or two bad turns in the past, and that I had the most determined intentions of walking off with the old Colonel's jewels if I could have found them, in which case they wouldn't have done you a ha'porth of good."

"I suppose not," said Collin, with a faint smile.

"Or me either in the long run, I daresay," resumed Murray. "I have made a mess of my life, Verschoyle; played the fool from beginning to end just as Eunice did. You felt her behaviour dreadfully at the time, I daresay; but as a matter of fact, old boy, it was just as well she jilted you, for you would have been confoundedly miserable if you'd married her—take my word for it."

"I daresay."

Murray looked at him with even more intentness than before, and was struck anew by the change a few weeks had made in him. His hair was quite grey at the temples, his face thinner, and more deeply lined than ever.

"Collin, I'm going to ask you a question that may sound impertinent, but you must remember I'm practically dying—oh, yes, I know all about 'while there's life there's hope,' but it's all rot as far as I'm concerned. Were you gone on that pretty Miss Seymour? Ah, I thought so. Well, then, why the deuce don't you marry her?"

"It's an odd question for you to put, Murray, you who were the first to tell me of her engagement to Sir James Lennox."

"An engagement that never existed. Yesterday when Jimmy was here—it was very good of him to come and see me just as he was on the point of starting for India, wasn't it?—I asked him and he told me all about it. It was his mistake all through. He proposed to the girl, and thought she accepted him, whereas, in reality, she did nothing of the kind. He told me as well of the letter she wrote him, and although I must say I don't think she acted altogether on the square with him, I do think she's straight at heart, otherwise she would never have given him up. Of course it was for your sake."

"Yes, after she had heard of the finding of the jewels, and the consequent fact of my being a rich man," Verschoyle rejoined, bitterly.

"Nothing of the sort. I was particular as to dates, and I found that she wrote her letter to him on the morning after the great storm, and before anyone, except you and myself, knew a syllable about the jewels. Old Seymour did not come here until the afternoon, so that it is impossible that he could have told her before that. Jimmy was awfully cut up at being thrown over, of course; but he'll get over it in time. This journey of his to the Himalayas is about the best thing he can do, and ten to one he'll come home engaged. I shan't live to see it, but you will."

He lay back on his pillow, closing his eyes, and for nearly half-an-hour the stillness was unbroken save by the regular ticking of the clock, and the echo of the reapers' laughter across the fields.

During the whole of that time Collin remained in the same attitude, his elbows on his knees, his

head sunk in his hands, and when Murray once more opened his eyes he had not moved.

"Look here, old man, my memory is not overburdened with the recollection of many good deeds, but I should like to feel that I had been somehow the means of bringing you and that girl together," Denzil said, with unusual energy. "She's fond of you—I'm sure of it."

"Then why wasn't she true?"

"She was true. If her head was turned for a little while by all the admiration lavished upon her, it's not greatly to be wondered at. I suppose we are all liable to err, but if we retrace one downward step before we take a second in the same direction we can surely claim pardon as a right. I'm not much of a preacher, but life's too short to let happiness go by when it is within our reach, you may be quite sure of that. You take my advice and make it up with Rosalind Seymour. If I were inclined to be melodramatic, which I'm not, I should insist on it as my dying request."

"And is that the only one you have to make?" asked Colin, significantly.

Murray waited a few minutes before he replied. "No," he said at length, "there's one more thing I want you to do for me. Get Nora Daintree over here to wish me good-by."

"All right, Murray, it shall be done."

"Only," added Denzil, quickly, and there seemed a strange incongruity between his man-of-the-world's caution and the conditions under which it was exercised, "you must not let anyone know about it, because it might injure her chances later on. People might think we had been engaged, and that is not the case. Go over at once to Miss Seymour and she'll manage it for you."

Colin started slightly and reddened. He hesitated for a moment; but, as he met the full glance of the dying man's eyes, his hesitation quickened into resolve, and calling the nurse who was waiting in an adjoining room to attend to the patient, he put on his hat and left the house.

The short cut to the Vicarage brought him there in less than twenty minutes. He walked across the lawn through the long untidy grass, past the Vicar's study, where he caught a glimpse of a grey head bent over a pile of manuscripts, and on to the parlour, the door of which was open. Inside sat Rosalind—Cinderella, once more engaged in the homely occupation of darning socks. But her left hand, with the sock drawn over it lay idle on her lap, while the right hung down at her side, and her eyes were gazing abstractedly out of the open window. So absorbed was she in her thoughts that she did not notice the quiet figure standing on the threshold, and he had time to observe her at his leisure. She was changed, her rich colour had faded, her mouth, with its downward drooping curves, had a wistfully pathetic look that was new to it, her whole demeanour seemed quieter and more subdued, hinting, indeed, at the action of those "cleansing fires" through which she had passed.

Suddenly, she looked up, and their eyes met. In a moment she had sprung to her feet, her eyes dilating, her lips quivering painfully, uncertain what to do or say. This was the first time they had met since the night in Park lane—now nearly five weeks ago.

When he started out to obey Murray's request, and get Nora to come and see him, Colin had not fully made up his mind as to his own course of conduct. He was still full of doubts, but at the sight of the pathetic girl's face with its sorrowful eyes these doubts were all swept away. He took one step forward uttering her name, and she, with a low glad cry, sprang towards him, knowing herself forgiven.

A week afterwards Denzil Murray was carried to his last resting-place, and when the October barries were red in the hedges, and the virginia creeper at the court was a splendid tangle of orange and scarlet, Colin Verschoyle took his bride home.

[THE END.]

Every civilized nation of the world, even China and Japan, now has a weather bureau.

FACETIE.

To get a dinner of great variety cooks should be allowed a wide margin.

INQUIRER: "What is the extreme penalty for bigamy?" "Two mothers-in-law."

MAMMA (severely): "Johnny, what made you steal the cake?" Johnny: "My appetite."

"My boy," said the musician to his son, "don't be too sharp nor yet too flat. Just be natural."

"OLD ROWLEY was a stingy man." "Yes; they say he died so that he would not have to pay his doctor's bill."

MRS. ENPIK: "Marriage is only a lottery, anyhow." Mr. Enpiik: "Hardly; a man gets a prize sometimes in a lottery."

FIRST MAN: "Heard Johnny's got a baby?" Second Ditto: "Ya—as, two." "Whew! What did he say?" "The ducose!"

SHE: "Then you believe in nothing?" He: "I believe everything I can understand." She: "Oh, well, that amounts to the same thing."

FARMER TURNIPS: "I heard that your son in Australia was coining money." Farmer Heya: "He was, until the police got too sharp for him."

MASON: "Your wife's receptions are charming, Biggs." Stacy Biggs: "You ought to try one of the 4 A.M. kind she gives me after a quiet game at the club."

"COME, Bill, it is ten o'clock; let us go. It is time honest folks were home." "Yes," was the reply, "I must be off; but you needn't go on that account."

"I LEAVE all that I have to my son Michael, who is the only one of my children who never kicked me when I was down," in the will of a recently deceased Irishman.

FATHER: "You want to marry my daughter? What are your prospects?" Lover: "Splendid. I consulted a fortune-teller yesterday, and she says I am going to be rich."

"You don't love me any more, John. The idea of getting home at this time of night!" "Why, my dear, it's a great deal earlier than I used to get home when I was courting you."

JOHNNY: "My pa's captain of our house." Teacher: "And your mother?" "Ma's pilot." "And you?" Johnny (scratching his ear): "I suppose I'm the compass; I'm always getting boxed."

HE: "It was rather strange that you should have clear weather throughout the voyage." She: "Not at all. I was told that the captain swept the sky with his telescope the first thing every morning."

AT BRIGHTON.—She: "You have met the beautiful Miss X, have you not? What do you think of her?" He: "She is one of that kind of woman that any man could die for, but none could live with."

SHE: "I'm surprised at you, sir, to come home at this hour. You ought to be ashamed to look at the clock." He: "No'sh, dearsh, other waysah about—clocksh 'shamed to look at me, 'cause he'sh holding both hissh hands before hissh face."

LITTLE Susie carried to a neighbour's house a beautiful pat of butter all covered with fanciful markings. "How does your mother make the butter look so pretty, my dear?" someone asked. "Oh, she did that with her back-hair-comb," said Susie.

YOUNG PHLEGM (to Editor): "I want your real opinion about those verses." Editor: "They are clumsy, vulgar, idiotic, and hardly a line scans." Y. P.: "What luck if you could set it to music, it would make our fortunes as a comic song!"

YOUNG LADY: "I am tired of living on my relatives, and want to be independent." Employment Agent: "I might get you a place in a shop." "That won't do. I'd be under some one's orders continually. I want to be independent of everything and everybody." "Ah, I see. I'll get you a place as cook."

SHE: "Mr. Ardent, if you insist upon making love to me every time you call I must ask you to discontinue your visits." He: "Only marry me, and I'll never speak another word of love as long as we live."

FRIEND (after tea): "Your little wife is brilliantly handsome woman. I should think you'd be jealous of her." Host (confidentially): "To tell you the truth, Simpkins, I am. I never invite anybody here that any sane woman would take a fancy to."

HUSBAND: "I wish to speak to you about your hair—" Wife (jumping at him): "You used to say my hair was the most glorious feature of my beauty." Husband (hedging): "Yes, yes, dear, and that is why I want to economise it—when you are cooking."

PROPRIETOR: "What are you taking back there?" Waiter: "Customer sent this steak back. Says he can't cut it." Proprietor (examining it critically): "Take it back, and tell the gentleman he'll have to pay for it. We can't use it again—he has bent it all out of shape."

MR. P.: "These two seats you gave me are in different rows, one behind the other." Ticket-seller: "One seat is for a lady, is it not?" Mr. P.: "Yes." Ticket-seller: "Well, that is all right, then. You are expected to sit behind the lady, and if you bring one with a big hat, it's your own fault. That's the way we sell 'em now."

BILL: "I say, Tom, who's that long-haired chap as just passed with 't' passon?" Tom: "I heered as how he's a poet or summat. I does feel sorry like for them fellers." Bill: "Cos why, Tom?" Tom: "Why? He 'as to have a licence every time he goes out. 'Ast tha never heered on a poet's licence?" Bill: "Oh, ay! Poor chap!"

His was the fierceness of desperation. "You must take me just as I am," he exclaimed, "or not at all." For an instant only she contemplated him. "As you like," she observed, not without a tincture of regret in her manner, "but I am sure you will be sorry"—she reached for her hand camera—"that you didn't look pleasanter and held your chin just a trifle higher."

WEATHER PROPHECY: "I hit it again. I never fail." Ordinary Man: "Huh! The thermometer has dropped twenty degrees, and it is raining pitch-forks. You predicted fair and warmer." Weather Prophet: "I predicted fair and warmer, with increased humidity. I may have been a trifle off on the fair and warmer, but you can't deny the humidity, sir—no, sir."

KATHLEEN had been put out to service, and Mrs. Berry liked the rosy face of the young Irish girl. One day Kathleen was sent on an errand to town. She was longer than usual, and Mrs. Berry stood on the porch as she came through the field. Kathleen was happy, and Mrs. Berry observed, "Why, Kathleen, what a rosy, happy face to-day. You look as if the dew had kissed you." Kathleen dropped her eyes and murmured softly, "Indade, mum, but that wasn't his name."

SOME candidates for vacancies on a provincial railway were being examined with regard to sight, hearing, &c. To one of the candidates the examiner said: "As to your hearing, can you hear the ticking of this watch? I will put it a foot from your ear." "Yes, sir, I can hear it quite distinctly." "Very good. Now go about three yards away. Can you hear it now?" "Certainly, sir." "Ah," said the examiner, "your powers of hearing are remarkable. This watch hasn't been going for the last fortnight."

TERRA's a man in Bloomsbury who has a mania for collecting all sorts of queer facts in history, science, and so forth, and his wife can't appreciate him at all. The other evening he laid down his paper. "That's odd," he said to her. "What," she inquired. "The statement that it would take 12,000,000 years to pump the sea dry at the rate of 1,000 gallons a second." She studied the statement profoundly for a full minute. "Where would they put all the water?" she asked innocently, and he paid no attention whatever to the question.

SOCIETY.

THE young Duke of Albany has taken a great liking to acting and theatricals, and recites one or two dramatic pieces with much effect.

PRINCE ADOLPHUS of Teck will be given a captaincy in the Earl of Chester's Yeomanry Cavalry, but he will still continue to serve in the regular army.

PRINCESS CHRISTIAN is going to Cronberg on a visit to the Empress Frederick, and she will spend next month at Darmstadt, returning to Windsor early in October.

DURING September and October the Grand Duchess of Hesse, Prince and Princess Henry of Prussia, and the Duke and Duchess of Connaught will be entertained at Balmoral.

BIKCYCLISTS will be interested to learn that they have a new and charming accession to their ranks in the person of Queen Margherita of Italy, who has been seized with the prevailing cyclomania.

THE Empress Frederick has decided to pass next winter in Italy, it being her intention to spend two months at Rome and the same period at Naples. The Empress will probably come to England from Cronberg at the end of October, to visit the Queen at Balmoral and the Prince and Princess of Wales at Sandringham, before her departure to Italy.

THE marriage of the Czarewitch and Princess Alix of Hesse, which was to have taken place in November at St. Petersburg, has been postponed until the middle of January, when the Prince and Princess of Wales and their daughters will go to Russia to be present at the wedding, and also the Duke and Duchess of Connaught and Princess Beatrice and Prince Henry of Battenberg.

PRESIDENT CARNOT hired all his carriage horses; but his successor intends to keep a stable of his own, and he has ordered the purchase of twelve bays, standing not less than 16.2, of which four will be used on state occasions for his full-dress landau, with postillions. The new President's liveries are brown (M. Carnot's were blue), and all the carriages are to be forthwith lined with brown cloth instead of blue.

THE Princess of Wales and her daughters are going to Gmunzen to visit the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland, and the Czarina will probably accompany them. The Princess and her daughters are afterwards going to Copenhagen, on their annual visit to the King and Queen of Denmark at Fredensborg. They are not expected to return to England until the end of October, when they will go to Sandringham for the winter.

THE hour fixed for the Grand Duchess Xenia's marriage was three o'clock on Monday, the rite being performed in the Peterhof Palace. A banquet followed at half-past six, when three hundred illustrious relatives and friends of the young couple drank their health; and then came a State concert. Meantime the happy pair started for the Ropsha Palace, which is about twenty miles from Peterhof, where they enjoyed three days of honeymoon seclusion.

THE Crown Prince and Princess of Denmark received some nice presents for their Silver Wedding celebration. First on the list was a sum of about £4,000 subscribed in silver by 211,000 subscribers; this the Prince and Princess intend to distribute to aid sick and poor women in the Danish Kingdom, so that many a suffering and needy female in the peninsula will bless the memory of the Royal gail. Then the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland sent their brother four splendid Hanoverian horses, matchless bays; the King and Queen gave a table service decorated with the *flora danica*; the children of the Crown Prince offered their parents two silver carafes; and, besides the horses the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland gave a silver tray with a dozen silver egg cups and spoons. The King and Queen of the Hellenes and the Prince and Princess of Wales clubbed together for their remembrance; it consists of a large and handsome basket in silver open work, inscribed with the names of the Crown Prince and Princess and of the givers.

STATISTICS.

A COMPLETE set of British birds' eggs is worth about £200.

A MATHEMATICIAN has computed the movements of a rider's feet while operating a bicycle, and has demonstrated that it requires less exertion to travel 15 miles on a bicycle than to walk 3 miles.

THE ordinary pension to the widow of a lieutenant in the army is £40, and £10 for each child. A captain's widow has £50, and £12 for each child; a lieutenant-colonel's widow £60, and £16 for each child; a general's widow £120, and £20 for each child. If his death is directly traceable to fatigue, privation, exposure, etc., the pensions are increased by half as much again; if he is killed in action, or die of wounds within twelve months of the battle, the pensions are doubled. The ordinary pensions are not granted if the officer was 25 years older than his wife.

GEMS.

SUCH as thy words are, such will thy affections be; such thy deeds as thy affections; such thy life as thy deeds.

THE man who spends his life in "getting even" for real or supposed injuries, is a torment to himself and generally a bore to his friends.

GREATNESS stands upon a precipice, and if prosperity carry a man never so little beyond his poise, it overbears and dashes him to pieces.

THE biting sarcasm and the cutting ridicule that give amusement to the unthinking and ill-disposed by their keen edge, cut at the root of many an innocent person's happiness.

THE young boys that went to Athens the first year, were wise men; the second year, philosophers, lovers of wisdom; the third year, were orators; and the fourth but plebians, and understood nothing but their own ignorance.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SPICED CURRANTS.—Three pounds of white sugar, five pounds of ripe currants, one tablespoonful each of cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and allspice. Boil currants one hour, then add the sugar, spices, and one half-pint of vinegar; boil half an hour longer.

HAM PATTIES.—One pint of ham which has been previously cooked, mix with two parts of bread crumbs wet with milk. Put the batter in jam pans, break one egg over each, sprinkle the top thickly with cracker crumbs, and bake until browned over.

LOBSTER SOUP.—Cut a lobster weighing four pounds in small pieces. Place in a bowl six crackers rolled fine, one cup of butter, salt, and a very little cayenne pepper; mix well together. Heat three pints of milk and one of water, stir in the mixture, boil two or three minutes, add the cut lobster, and boil up at once.

VEGETABLE MARROW SOUP.—Ingredients: Four young vegetable marrow, or more if very small, half a pint of cream, salt and white pepper to taste, two quarts of white stock. Part and slice the marrows, and put them in the stock boiling. When done to a mash, press them through a sieve, and at the moment of serving add the boiling cream and seasoning. Time, one hour.

CHICKEN BOILED WITH RICE.—Stew a chicken in some well-skimmed, clear mutton broth, and seasoned with onion, mace, pepper, and salt. About half an hour before it is ready, put in a quarter of a pint of rice, well washed and soaked. Simmer till tender, then strain it from the broth, and put the rice on a sieve before the fire. Keep the fowl hot, lay it in the middle of a dish and the rice round it without the broth. The less liquor the chicken is done with the better. Serve with gravy, or parsley and butter for sauce.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE most valuable pearls are perfect spheres. NEARLY all of the world's supply of opium comes from India.

ONE of the old Greek laws provided that if a man divorced his wife he could not marry a woman younger than the discarded partner.

THE sweetest and most undisturbed sleep is always enjoyed in a thoroughly darkened room. Light acts upon the brain, and those who sleep with their blinds up will find that in the summer-time, when so few hours are really dark, their sleep is restless and disturbed. This is often pinned to the account of heat, but more often than not it is the light which causes wakefulness.

A HAMMOCK hung according to rule should be six and a quarter feet from the ground at the head, and three and three-quarters above the ground at the foot end. The rope that secures the head end should be less than twelve inches, and that at the foot should measure four and a half feet. Arranged in this way, the lower part will swing freely, and the head be kept comfortable by being nearly stationary.

CUCKOOS are the only birds that eat hairy caterpillars, so far as is known. The horny linings of their gizzards are sometimes found so thickly perforated by the sharp and strong hairs of these insects as to be actually "fuzzy" when dried. Not long ago a crow from Oregon was examined, whose digestive apparatus contained a beetle of a species so rare that the specimen would have been worth fifteen dollars if it had been in good condition.

A USEFUL device has been designed for learning the motions of swimming. It consists of a wire stretched tightly across the swimming bath. Two grooved pulleys run along the wire, and a rope is passed through the lower pulley reaching to the surface of the water. A belt of special make is worn by the pupil, which, by means of swivel and rings allows the wearer to lie in any desired position. As soon as the swimmer acquires the proper motions, the wheel moves along the wire. This makes the lesson interesting and much less fatiguing than the old method of pole and rope.

A ONCE precious diadem, which is now only an historical relic of much interest, is the ancient crown of the Scotch kings, kept in the castle of Edinburgh. It is supposed to have been made for Robert Bruce, and is formed of two circles of gold, the upper and narrower circle being surmounted by a row of crosses and gem-encrusted imitation flowers. The lower ring, the head band proper, is adorned from end to end of the golden band with large precious stones of different kinds, mostly in their rough, unpolished state. Above arise two arches of gold, which unite and are surmounted by the historic "cross and ball."

A CAMEL has twice the carrying power of an ox. With an ordinary load of four hundred pounds, he can travel twelve or fourteen days without water, going forty miles a day. They are fit to work at five years old, but their strength begins to decline at twenty-five, although they usually live to forty. The Tartars have herds of these animals, often one thousand belonging to one family. They were numerous in antiquity, for the patriarch Job had three thousand. The Timbuctoo or Meharri breed, is remarkable for speed, and used only for couriers, going eight hundred miles in eight days, with a meal of dates or grain at nightfall.

WHEN a maiden is betrothed in Germany she is called bride by her sweetheart, who addresses her thus until it becomes time to call her wife. Immediately upon betrothal the lovers exchange rings, which, if the course of true love runs smooth, are to be worn ever afterwards until death parts them. The woman wears her betrothal ring on the third finger of her left hand until she is married, and then it is transferred to the third finger of her right hand. The husband continues to wear the ring just as the wife wore hers when she was a bride, so that one can tell easily at a glance if a man be or be not mortgaged as to his affections.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

R. T. B.—Replies are never given to trade questions.

MISER.—A woman becomes of legal age at twenty-one years.

HARVEST INQUIRER.—You had better submit it to counsel.

AN OLD READER.—We do not give the addresses of business firms.

WORMED READER.—It is said that cucumber peels will kill cockroaches.

FLITTO.—We suggest that you mix sulphur with vasoline for the purpose desired.

COCKNEY.—The place "Pall Mall" is usually pronounced as if spelt "Pell Mell."

DOUBTFUL.—No; you cannot be held responsible, as there has been no delivery of the goods.

GUINEVERE.—The word *personnat* (boarding-school) is pronounced as though spelt *pong-see-o-zaw*.

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—A man is liable to punishment for making a false statement in order to be exculpated.

CONSTANT READER.—Child takes its nationality from its father, no matter where born or who its mother may be.

UNSTABLE.—A mistress may give a month's notice at any part of the month. Wages must be paid for the full time served.

ROSALIE.—The name Rosalie is pronounced *ros-a-lee*; the accent on the first syllable; the same as Rosalind, Rosamond, Rosabel.

MAID MARION.—Alum dried to a clinder and powdered may be dusted among clothes, &c., with good effect whenever the moth shows.

DEPRECIATION.—Get a copy of London sporting paper, or the *Morning Post*, and see advertisements there for grooms and stablemen generally.

SUFFERING ONE.—A hard corn solvent is made with a solution of tartar or pearlash. Keep it in a jar until it forms an oil-like liquid, and run it on the corn.

YOUNG MOTHER.—When thin flannel under-garments irritate the skin of the baby in hot weather, place between them and the skin a layer of soft linen or muslin.

OLIVE.—To keep the hands white and soft they should be washed in soft tepid water and with good soap, and a little olive oil rubbed in before the hands are put into the water.

BASHFUL.—It is optional with the lady to be present or absent. As a rule, the gentleman prefers a private interview with the lady's father when soliciting his approval of the proposed alliance.

COUNTRY READER.—The foundation-stone of the Victoria Law Courts was laid by the Queen on March 23rd, 1837. The Courts were opened by the Prince and Princess of Wales on July 21st, 1891.

MILLIE.—Warm the paraffin and after the corks are in tightly press the soft mass closely about the top, being careful to see that all crevices are closed. Or melt the paraffin and dip the top of the jars in it.

M. W.—You will have to take the sentiment of the community in which he lives as his guide, unless he wants to be sufficiently independent and self-respecting to keep himself free from the use of the weed altogether.

BRITON.—German silver derives its name from the fact that its first introduction in the arts, to any great extent, was made in Germany. It does not contain a single particle of real silver; it is only an alloy of copper, nickel, and zinc.

PAULINE.—Cover them with boiling water half a minute, then lay them in cold water until perfectly cold, and the skin can be peeled off without difficulty, leaving the tomatoes unbroken and as firm as they were before being scalded.

C. N.—A stamp is necessary on all formal receipts for £3 or more in ordinary commercial dealings, whether settled by passing of money, cheque, or per contra; when a bill is used the receiver puts his name upon it, and that is sufficient receipt.

DISTRESSED.—Unusual perspiration of the hands and feet may be relieved by bathing in strong salt and water, or in a mixture of one ounce each of alcohol and water, with fifty grains of quinine dissolved therein. If the case is serious, a physician should be consulted.

ADMIRING READER.—The trouble complained of may arise from an impoverished state of the blood. The following recipe is recommended. Tincture of steel, two drams; dilute muriatic acid, one dram; syrup of orange peel, one ounce; infusion of calumba, seven ounces. Mix.

A. C.—The champion fasters of the world are the members of a religious body called the Jains, of India. They have frequent fasts that last from thirty to forty days. Once each year there is a grand fast which endures seventy-five days. During this time they are allowed to drink warm water.

LOVER OF FRESH AIR.—In order to ventilate your rooms thoroughly, open your windows at the top and the bottom. An opening of three feet at the bottom only will do less good than apertures of six inches both at the top and bottom, as at once opening the vitiated air passes out, at the other the pure air comes in.

IDA.—Make some bran moist with warm water; it should not be sloppy, but thoroughly moist. Lay your collarette on the table, and with a piece of flannel, while the moist bran is warm, rub it in, and continue rubbing till it is quite dry, then have some fresh dry bran, which rub in with a piece of book muslin, and finally shake and brush clear of the bran.

ETIQUETTE.—According to custom a comparative stranger should either give a card to the servant, or if the lady chances to open the door, he may leave the card in the basket. The object of this is evident when one reflects that it is from the cards that invitation lists are often made out, and one who is only a social acquaintance might be overlooked.

BARBARA.—One pint linseed oil, half a pound mutton suet, half a pound beeswax, and a small piece of resin. Boil all together in a vessel standing in water, letting them thoroughly melt, mix and amalgamate, and when cooled down to milk warm apply with a brush to the boots. Let it sink well into the leather then apply a second coat, which will secure the waterproof quality you require.

SALLIE.—To polish furniture the following recipe will be found excellent: Dissolve four ounces of the best shellac in two pints of ninety-five per cent. alcohol; add to this two pints of linseed oil, and one pint of spirits of turpentine; when mixed, add four ounces of sulphuric ether, and four ounces of ammonia water; mix thoroughly. Shake before using, and apply with a sponge lightly.

ANXIOUS.—The lady had no right to receive the attentions of the gentleman who was ignorant of any existing engagement, and she was greatly to blame for engaging herself to him, while under an engagement to marry another. As to the right to see the letters written upon the two engagements, we are not prepared to decide, not knowing all the circumstances attending the second betrothal.

A SCOLDING TONGUE.

The wife would frown and cry,
The wife would fret and moan,
And scold, till the heart of the husband grew
As hard as the nether stone!

Till the fire of the hearth grew dim,
Unlike the fire of home,
And the weary feet that fain would rest
Were driven afar to roam.

Till the children looked in vain
For a smile on the mother's face,
And the neighbours looked in vain to see
A father in his place.

Till the meal in his bin waxed low—
And the news like lightning sped
That the money the tippling father earned
Bought a lie instead of bread.

Till the weeds were tall and rank,
And the gate and doors unbung,
A scattered flock, a refined home,
And all through a scolding tongue.

M. A. K.

F. H.—A codicil is a supplement to a will, when anything is omitted which the testator would add, or which he would explain, alter, or retract; and it is the same with a testament, and taken as part thereof, and it must be executed in the same manner, as a will, and be attested by two witnesses at least, who must be present when the testator signs or acknowledges it, and they must sign their names as witnesses thereto in his presence, and in the presence of each other.

INQUIRITIVE.—It is not known when oysters were first eaten. They have been used for food from the most ancient times. There are said to be more than fifty kinds. They grow commonly near shores, in water twenty to fifty feet deep, generally in quiet bays or rivers, or in the mouths of rivers. They cannot live in fresh water, but sometimes live a long time out of water, as when the tides are low, they having water enough in their shells to last them until the tide comes to their relief.

SOUP.—A fine vegetable soup is made of one bunch of celery, one pint of stewed tomatoes, one onion, three carrots, four turnips, a little salt. Chop all vegetables, except the tomatoes, very finely, and place them in the pot over the fire, with about three quarts and a pint of hot water. Let them cook slowly about an hour, then stir in the tomatoes, and boil about half an hour longer; remove from the fire, and rub the mixture through a colander; then return the soup to the fire. Now stir in a tablespoonful of butter and half a cupful of milk, with a little cornstarch or flour mixed with it. Let the soup boil up once, and it will be ready for the table.

A FAILURE.—Never give way to utter despair. Remember whatever your fortune may be, it might be worse. It is well for the ambitious to attempt great enterprises, to try to elevate themselves above the mass of mankind, and to enter into speculations which promise great reward. But while all this is very commendable, it is also well to cast our eyes low and then upon those not so comfortably off as ourselves. When we look around us and see the many who are little better than mere "hewers of wood and drawers of water;" when we contrast their destiny with ours, if the contrast be greatly in our favour, we should feel grateful that such is the fact, and cease to grumble over a condition which we cannot help.

OLD SUBSCRIBER.—People of all kinds are to be met with wherever you may chance to be. In selecting acquaintances you should exercise some judgment; preferring those of good sense to any others, however pretentious. Do not make up your mind concerning any one to whom you have been casually or even formally introduced by what he or she may say or appear in one interview. Some people are governed too much by their first impressions; they may prove somewhat correct, but they are not infallible.

A GOOD WIFE.—To prepare codfish with cheese, soak over night, in cold water, a piece of salt codfish. In the morning pick it to pieces, freeing it from bits of skin and bone. Bring a teacupful of milk to the boiling point, thicken with two full tablespoonfuls of corn starch, rubbed into a tablespoonful of butter. When the gravy is thick, add the codfish and allow it to become thoroughly heated, but not to boil. Then add a creamed pudding dish, not much the top thickly with grated cheese, and brown in the oven. Serve hot.

DORA.—For curry, chickens, rabbits and veal are most suitable. Boil the meat until tender, then separate the joints, put the meat into a stew pan with a lump of butter and a little of the liquor in which it was boiled, and stew it for twenty minutes longer; then to four pounds of meat take a tablespoonful of flour and one of melted butter, a teacupful of the liquor and half a teacupful of salt; mix them, and stew the meat in the liquor for ten minutes, when it will be ready to serve. Boiled rice is served as an accompaniment.

MAIDALENE.—To four and a half gallons of water use five pounds white sugar, the juice and peel of four lemons, bruised ginger, five ounces. Boil the ginger in one gallon of water for half an hour with the peel of the lemons, then the sugar and lemon juice, with the remaining three and a half gallons of water, which must be boiling when you add it. Then strain it through a cloth, and when cold add the quarter of the white of an egg, beaten well up with a small quantity of the liquor. Allow it to stand for four days, then bottle and cork well.

MAID MARIAN.—The traditions concerning him are mostly embodied in the account given by Stow, who says that Robin Hood and "Little John" were renowned thieves who killed none but those who resisted them. He suffered no woman to be oppressed or molested, and he spared poor men's goods. He commanded a hundred tall and good archers. He is said to have been bled to death by a nun to whom he repaired for advice on account of her skill in medicine. "Little John" is supposed to have been a real monk. Hood's exploits were chiefly confined to Sherwood Forest, in Nottingham. Marion was his favourite companion.

ALMA.—Put a tablespoonful of butter in a saucepan and stir in an equal quantity of flour; cook this thoroughly, but do not let it take colour. Add to this half a pint of boiled veal stock and the same of cream; season with pepper and salt and grated nutmeg; stir for a few minutes and strain. Now add three ounces of Parmesan cheese and three egg yolks well beaten, and stir until very hot, but do not let it boil. Lay some boiled asparagus on a dish and spread this sauce smoothly over the upper half of the stalks only; sprinkle with grated cheese and bread crumbs; dot with bits of butter; lay an inverted pan over the dish, so that only the part with sauce will be exposed to the heat, and bake a light brown.

HOUSEWIFE.—To make a plum pudding, take half a pound of flour, a pound of stale bread crumbs, a pound of beef and chopped fine, a pound of currants well picked, washed, and dried, a pound of raisins stoned and chopped, three-quarters of a pound of sugar, a quarter of a pound of candied orange and lemon peel, an ounce of powdered cinnamon, half an ounce of ground ginger, a nutmeg grated, twelve bitter almonds blanched and grated, and a little salt; mix these well together; then beat up seven eggs, strain them through a sieve, and add a little sweet milk if required. Stir this well into the other ingredients; make it thick, but not too stiff. Just before you are going to boil it stir into it a glass of brandy, scald a cloth, flour it, and lay it in a basin; pour in your pudding; then have ready another cloth, also scalded and floured, which lay over the top, tie it round tightly, and put it in boiling water, of which there should be abundance, as well as plenty of room. Keep it boiling for six or seven hours. When it is done, take it out of the pot, let it stand a few minutes to cool, or dip it into cold water; then turn it out into a dish and serve it with sauce.

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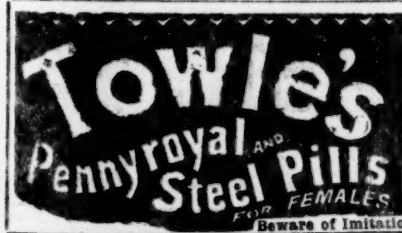
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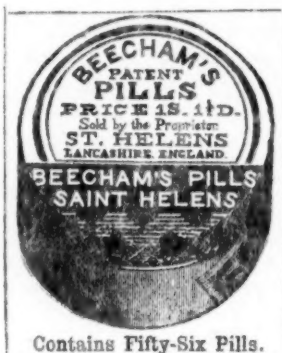
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